WAIT FOR THE END

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 698.

WAIT FOR THE END BY MARK LEMON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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A STORY.

BY

MARK LEMON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1864.

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WAIT FOR THE END.

CHAPTER I.

The beginning of the End — The Half-Brothers.

October the 30th, 18 —, was a great day for —— College. It had scored 169 against 140 on the return match with M ——, and as Gerard Norwold had bowled or caught out nine wickets in the first innings, and seven in the second, his "side" had invited him to supper at Charlie Craven's, who was the fortunate possessor of the largest rooms in the College.

Gerard Norwold was what is usually called a good sort of fellow. He attended chapel and lectures pretty regularly, gave no great promise of future distinction, was a first-rate cricketer, a good runner, an accomplished horseman, and had been known to drive a tandem. He was a general favourite, and those who knew him intimately had for him the warmest regard. His half-brother Gilbert was strikingly opposed to him in appearance and pursuits. He was an extravagant dresser, much given to purchasing showy jewellery, addicted to betting, billiards, and card-playing. Indeed, he carried his passion for the latter vice so far, that it had been rumoured more than once, that he and another

man of the same College had made a bank for *rouge-et-noir*. He was known to have lost and won large sums, and his brother Gerard had often remonstrated with him on a course which had compelled frequent application to home for money, and led to more than one unpleasant interview with the College authorities. It had been hinted, also, that upon one occasion when a Newmarket favourite had died on the evening preceding the race, Gilbert Norwold, having had private information of the dangerous condition of the horse, had improved the occasion to his own advantage. The brothers were in fact so widely separated by their tastes and dispositions, that they were rarely seen together, and Gilbert had not been asked to the supper-party at Charlie Craven's, although many men of other Colleges had received invitations.

At eight o'clock Charlie Craven's rooms were thrown open to receive company. His neat little camp bedstead was soon covered with the caps and hats of the guests, who scrambled for places, and gave assurance by their loud laughter and noisy ejaculations that a merry evening was to succeed to a day of triumph. Charlie Craven was called to the chair by acclamation, and as a matter of course, the guest of the evening, Gerard Norwold, occupied the place of honour beside him. The attractiveness of the viands produced a momentary lull in the vociferous storm which broke forth again with redoubled force during the distribution of the good things upon the table, and it was not until the entire party had settled down to

their work of destruction that moderate weather prevailed. One generous fellow, however, who had come up the same year as Gerard, and who had for his prowess and social qualities the highest admiration, was not to be quieted. He had knelt down in the Cricket-tent on the declaration of the score, and vowed "to pour a libation" whenever the name of Gerard Norwold should be mentioned that day. The necessity for fulfilling his vow had occurred so frequently that a naturally strong head had yielded to the potency of the offerings, and continued to emit unlimited melody prematurely and vexatiously. At the persuasion of two judicious friends, Pylades consented to retire into the bed-room, and was subsequently reported to be as well as could be expected among the hats and caps on Charlie Craven's camp bedstead.

The tables having been cleared and glasses of divers fashions placed thereon, bowls of steaming Bishop and frothing milk-punch succeeded, and the revel began in earnest. When an assembly of orators insist on the right to be heard at the same time, it is difficult for the most practised ear to note accurately the gist of any individual speaker's observations, and as no conglomeration of words would convey a notion of the universal conversation of Charlie Craven's guests, the reader must be content to remain as uninstructed as he would have been had he been present. At last something like unanimity prevailed, and the cry for a song rose above the general hubbub. The suggestion was favourably received, and the request so

earnestly enforced that it seemed for some time that the demand was considered equal to the supply. By much hammering on the part of the Chairman and his adherents, and the loudest vociferations for silence on the part of the most persistent disturbers, vocal harmony prevailed.

The song had been heard a hundred times before within these old college walls, but its charm seemed undiminished by age, and could only have been indebted for its universal and university popularity to its unintelligibility. *Ex. gr.*

"I'll sing you a one O!
Green grow the rushes O!
What is your one O?
When your one is all alone
It ever more shall be so.

"I'll sing you a two O!
Green grow the rushes O!
What is your two O?
Two, two lily-white boys
Clothèd all in green O!
When your one is all alone
It ever more shall be so."

And so on until it promised to monopolise the remainder of the evening. When the welcome cry of "Chori-us" was heard, every man gave tongue according to his fancy, producing a discord that would have driven the dummiest Mus: Doc: crazy. The applause which followed can only be fitly described as the concentrated essence of sound, and it was exciting to be-

hold the glasses and candlesticks and other moveables upon the table dance to the drumming of the enraptured assembly.

The Chairman rose. His position was instantly acknowledged by many kind inquiries after his health, and the expression of anxious doubts, whether he felt himself equal to the situation. Having repeatedly and most good-humouredly satisfied his questioners upon both points, he made nine attempts to propose the toast of the evening, seldom getting further than "Gentlemen, I rise." Concluding at length that eloquence would be unappreciated at that moment, he contented himself with filling a goblet to the brim (*loud cheers*), and shouting as only an under-graduate can shout in a confined space and oppressive atmosphere, "Gerard Norwold's health and wickets!"

Then up rose every man in answer to the pledge, and as the

> **"— war-horse at the trumpet's sound,**
> **Erects his mane and neighs and paws the ground,"**

so each loud hurrah! excited those convivial spirits to mount the chairs, and ultimately to set foot upon the tables, until the oppressed mahogany, staggering beneath the weight, upset one of the sconces into the Bishop bowl, and rendered unstable the positions of "slip" and "longstop," who, clinging to each other for support, fell together to the floor. Song followed song, and cheer succeeded cheer; but amid all this merry riot not one unseemly word was spoken, nor was one ungentle act committed; none "drunk, but nobly mad,"

and all resulting from the unrestrained enjoyment of generous natures, as yet uncorrupted and unsaddened by contact with the world.

It was now eleven o'clock, and the house rose. It became necessary to rouse Pylades from his slumber before Craven could "speed his parting guest." Pity, earnest pity, for the loss of such an evening saved Pylades from making atonement for smashed beavers and broken trenchers, and more than one generous hand proffered beakers of hock and soda or some more powerful stimulant.

Pylades — his name was Leyton, now perfectly recovered from his temporary obfuscation — and Gerard walked leisurely towards their respective rooms in the quadrangle. The night was sultry, and many of the windows were opened, though lights shone only from two or three.

"My brother has a visitor to-night," said Gerard, as they approached a room on the ground-floor, and whose window was open and lighted from within. Gerard drew aside the curtain with the intention of wishing his brother and his guest good night. Before he could speak, however, something he saw in his brother's room alarmed or distressed him so greatly, that he seized Leyton's arm as though to save himself from falling. Leyton naturally inquired the cause of this sudden change; but Gerard remained silent, still grasping the arm of his friend and hurrying from the window.

When they reached Leyton's rooms, Gerard asked

for drink of any kind, and it was not until he had emptied a large water-goblet filled with wine that he appeared capable of speech.

"Leyton," he said, "if what I have seen to-night in my brother's room be true, I and he and all of us who bear his name are most unhappy. Ask me nothing more to-night, but I promise you, that if I require aid or counsel, I will come to you. Do not go to bed for half an hour — I may return."

Gerard hastened to his brother's room. The light still shone within, but the outer door was closed and fastened. Gerard knocked violently, and called for admission at the same time. When Gilbert opened the door, he was evidently startled at the expression of his brother's face, and could not forbear asking what had happened? Gerard did not reply, but seated himself at the table where a freshman, named Mariott, was sitting, half stupefied by the strong wine he had drank and the excitement of the play in which he had been engaged, evidently, as there were cards upon the table.

"Well, Mariott," said Gerard, as soon as he could speak, "you will not listen to advice; you will not be warned, but are here again losing your money, and muddling your brains."

"Is that all you have come to say?" remarked Gilbert. "The morning would have been time enough, surely, for lectures."

Gerard did not reply to his brother, but spoke on.

"You have lost again to-night, Mariott; you have lost largely."

"I can pay what I have lost, Mr. Norwold," said Mariott rising, and taking a roll of notes from a silken note-case, he counted about thirty pounds and threw them upon the table.

"Take that money again, Mariott," said Gerard — "at least until to-morrow — until my brother asks you for it."

"I always pay my debts of honour immediately," answered the half tipsy loser, "and I allow no one to dictate to me on such a matter. Good night, Norwold, it is getting late, and as your brother seems disposed for a family row, I am in the way — Good night."

Gilbert did not seek to stay Mariott, but when he had gone he closed the door, and turning abruptly to his brother, said:

"Gerard Norwold, attend to what I am about to say. If we are to continue on terms of friendship, you must leave off these impertinent meddlings and intrusions. I admit no right of yours to choose my friends or to regulate my amusements. You have your pursuits, I have mine, and if I am again annoyed as I have been to-night, I shall cut with you altogether."

"Have you done?" asked Gerard, after a pause.

"For the present," was the reply.

"Then hear me, Gilbert Norwold, and perhaps for the last time. Did you not bear my father's name, you should not hear me at all, and I would cut with *you* altogether; but as anything which affects your

honour affects him — affects me — I have come here to-night with the determination to check you in your disgraceful practices, and compel you to make reparation to those whom you have injured."

Gilbert's face became livid, and his lips trembled either with rage or with the dread of the revelation his brother was about to make. He was not left long in suspense.

"Gilbert Norwold, you are a cheat, a mean despicable cheat. Don't speak! Don't move. I am the stronger man, and I will hold you in your chair and tell you of your villany. You have won large sums of the poor idiot who has just left us, not only by your greater skill in such miserable acquirements, but by stooping to play unfairly. You would deny it — I see it in your face — but I have had the evidence of my own eyes to prove this horrible accusation. Passing your window to-night, I drew aside the curtain to wish you a brotherly good night — I saw you deliberately place at your back one card and substitute for it another which you had previously placed behind you. I heard you exclaim 'Game again!' and what I saw — what I heard, I dare no more keep secret, nor would I, than I would the knowledge of a murder."

Gilbert was taken completely by surprise. He did not dare even to deny his brother's accusation, and could only stammer out — "So, Mr. Gerard Norwold descends to play the spy upon me."

"Tush!" exclaimed Gerard, "I have told you how

I came by my knowledge of your dishonour, and you believe me. Now, no evasion. You had better be truthful for the future. How much have you won of Mariott?"

Gilbert made no reply, but stood gazing sulkily upon the ground.

"Gilbert, this matter shall not rest until restitution has been made. If you have not the means of doing so, let me assist you. If you refuse, I have only one other course. I shall communicate with our father. You know him — you know that if he found you capable of this crime, he would turn you on the world, even if it broke his own proud heart to do so."

Gilbert still remained silent.

"What is your determination?" asked Gerard, after a pause of some moments.

"One question," said Gilbert. "Would you, supposing I deny this charge — would you, regardless of my mother — I do not say of me — would you tell this to my father?"

It was now Gerard's turn to be silent for some moments. He then said, taking his brother's hand, "Gilbert, your question, I am sure, does not require an answer. You will not make such an alternative possible. You will trust your brother, and tell me the worst. I will help you to the uttermost. Come! do not hesitate. Speak the truth."

Gilbert went to his writing-desk, and from a secret drawer within it, brought forth a small note-book in

which he had put down his late card winnings and his earlier losses.

The latter had been large, and not until the name of Mariott appeared on the page had his gains been great. Gerard, after a time, his distress rendering calculation difficult, reckoned up the sums Gilbert had obtained from his victim, and the total reached to nearly two hundred pounds.

"The amount is large," said Gerard, "larger than I had expected, but it must be paid. We must write home for money."

"That will be useless," replied Gilbert, "at least so far as I am concerned. Sir John has refused to send me more. I have had money unknown to you, for I have lost considerably by betting, and the trustees of one of my tradesmen have been pressing me. My credit is gone at Cambridge and I can get no more."

"You must ask your mother, then, for help," said Gerard.

Gilbert shook his head. "Useless! useless!" he replied. "Her pin-money is not great, and I have already had a hundred pounds from her."

Gerard was puzzled. "I dare not ask for more than fifty pounds, as I promised not to exceed my allowance. What is to be done?"

"There is one chance," said Gilbert, after a pause. "Jasper Jellifer has lent me money at times, and which my mother has repaid him. — He may have the means to help *us*."

Gerard looked up suddenly.

"I mean help me, although he told me that my mother's security was of no value. I think he would assist if he had your promise to see him repaid. In fact he said as much."

Gerard held out his hand to Gilbert, and instantly proffered to do all that was required provided the money could be obtained.

"Very well, then," said Gilbert. "I will write to him to-morrow, and go down to Morden on the following day, and if I find Sir John away from home, I will see my mother."

The course of action having been determined, Gerard proceeded at once to draw up an acknowledgment of the proposed loan. He was unskilled in such compositions, and it was not until he had made more than one attempt that he succeeded in completing the important document.

It was comprised in three short lines, with Gerard's signature attached, and yet it changed the current of more lives than one.

Leyton remained at his open window waiting the return of Gerard, his well-beloved friend. "All right, old boy," said Gerard, very cheerfully. "I cannot tell you what I have been saying to Gilbert: but it's all right. Good night."

Often and often, in after years, Gerard Norwold remembered this parting from his true Pylades, and regretted bitterly his silence upon what had passed in his brother's rooms.

Gilbert put out his lamp, and threw himself upon

his bed dressed as he was. He could not sleep, but again and again he went over the exciting scene just enacted, and strange unthankfulness! he always ended by repeating Gerard's words: "I have only one other course, I shall communicate with our father."

That thought was the last in his mind when he fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

Introduces Jack Spraggatt and his Skeleton, Jasper Jelliffer, and the Miller Ray.

No one entering Morden at its north end could fail to observe a large old-fashioned house, built, it was said, as early as the time of James the First. On one side was a large pond, whereon floated plump geese and ducks, like argosies, to be freighted hereafter with savoury stuffing, whilst overhead blue-rocks and runts, jacobines, nuns, and tumblers were gyrating and traversing to and fro a spacious dovecote, surmounted by a gilt vane. Its sloping roof, covered with grey stone healing, dotted here and there with tufts of stone-crop and houseleek, harmonised well with its white front, relieved by oak frame-work, painted black, and filled with latticed windows. A large porch of carved oak, with seats on either side, and partly concealed by creeping rose-trees and jasmine, marked the principal entrance, which was approached from the road by a broad gravel path, bordered by flower beds and well kept lawns, studded about with clumps of evergreens and flowering shrubs. Two giant elms, which overshadowed the garden gate, gave their name to the place, which had been occupied for several generations by the family of the Spraggatts, but the freehold itself belonged to Sir John Norwold. The

homestead of the farm was near the house, partly hidden by a grove of elms, whereon a colony of rooks had been long established. We shall have much to do presently with the inmates of this old house, now occupied by John Spraggatt — Jack Spraggatt he was called usually — his widowed mother, and two fair sisters.

The Elms was about half a mile from the High Street of the neighbouring town, which extended nearly to its boundary meadow. Morden was an improving place, and had taken a fancy to march southwards, so that the High Street, which had formerly been the principal place of trade, had fallen into poverty, being separated from the thriving market place and New Street by the bridge, which crossed the shallow river flowing through the town. The Town Hall, however, still gave an importance to High Street; and at election times, or on corporation festivals and ceremonials, the old street held up its head again, and claimed its place in Morden. The houses in the market place had grown up at various dates, and had been built without any attempt at uniformity, so that the old church, which stood in one corner, and had been frequently repaired and beautified, according to the taste of the church-wardens for the time being, did not appear such a mass of incongruity as it would have done had its neighbours been more regular in their construction. The shaft of the old cross had been kept in tolerable repair since its conversion to protestantism, and looked picturesque enough on market days when

surrounded by the butter sellers, generally farmers' daughters, and who always appeared, if not in their Sunday clothes, at least in their second best. We miss those rustic beauties sadly now-a-days from English market-places: they passed away when Capital bought up the small farmers, and turned out their little households to seek for other occupations, or new homes in the new world. The old farm-houses and their small homesteads still remain here and there, but changed, how changed! from what they were. The parlour-kitchen, with its clean brick floor, the cosy ingle, where the bright iron dogs glistened in the sun in summer time, giving place in winter to those of ruder make, when the crackling log blazed upon the hearth, the well-stored bacon-rack above your head, that told of savoury broils adorned with eggs like marigolds, the corner cupboard, which hid away the choicest crockery (heir-looms reserved for high days and holidays), the well-polished oaken dresser, on whose shelves were ranged pewter and blue delft plates, kept for the same high occasions; — (the wooden platter was thought good enough for working days;) — the square rush-bottomed chairs, broad enough to seat a Falstaff at his ease; the eight-day clock, whose tick — the voice of time — could, in the stillness of the night, be heard in distant chambers — are only memories. The carter and the ploughman, hard worked and ill paid, are now the men in possession, and manage someway to labour and live. No doubt the change is for the better; all changes are so

now-a-days; but those were not evil times, when the rustic toiler was certain of a coarse breakfast and supper of bull-broth and brown bread, a liberal dinner of fat bacon and strong cabbage in the farmer's outer kitchen, and a hard, warm bed, in the farmer's garret. God helps those toilers some way in our money-loving times, as they bear their lot so patiently.

In one corner of the market place was the shop of Jasper Jellifer. He was not particular as to the commodities he sold, and they ranged from peppermint drops to mill-stones. There were few wants of the farmer or the farmer's womankind that Jasper could not satisfy out of his *omnium gatherum* of a shop, and being a smooth-spoken fellow, he rarely lost a customer that had once given him a trial. He was a shrewd man, no doubt, and never took his eye off the main chance, as it is called, and when his neighbours had small difficulties which baffled their own ingenuity to overcome, Jasper was the man they consulted. When asked, he always gave advice, generally of a practical character, and the knowledge he thus obtained concerning many of his neighbours' affairs, invested him with an influence which he failed not to turn to his own profit. Always in a fair way, however, for though Jasper was known to drive a hard bargain, he gave good weight and just measure in all things. Still he was not a popular man with his fellow town's folk, with whom he rarely sought a close intimacy, and many who had profited by his shrewdness and caution, spoke of Jasper as a screw or a close-shaver, or a

money-grubber, and in truth he deserved those appellations, for no man ate at his board or drank of his cup. Philanthropic ladies and gentlemen in those days had not learned the art of being charitable at the expense of other people's pockets, or they would have called in vain on Jasper Jellifer. When a fire destroyed the tools of seven poor carpenters, and the market place made a subscription, Jasper avoided giving a shilling on the pretence that he had no change, and declined to put his name to the subscription list in case he should forget it. Being much pressed, at last he contributed in kind, and presented a few second-hand tools for the benefit of the sufferers. He did love money, no doubt of it, and the passion became stronger and stronger as he grew older and richer.

We said that no man ever shared his hospitality. We retract. We should have said that Raymond Ray, the miller, was Jasper's crony, and of late had been a frequent visitor and guest. And this intimacy was somewhat strange, as Ray was not a native of the place, but had come from the neighbourhood of London to work the water-mill outside the town. Nobody knew anything about him, but he was a pushing fellow, and having money at his command, he soon made his way with the good people of Morden. He was rather a loose liver, it was said, and, being a bachelor, and seemingly inclined to keep so, the scandal-mongers over their gossip-water did not spare him. His mill was turned by the stream which flowed through Norwold Park, and formed a pretty object as

seen from the library window of the Hall. Looking also from the footbridge which crossed the water near the entrance to the park, it would have made a good subject for a painter. Some limes planted upon the margin of the stream had grown aslant until their lowermost boughs dipped into the water, and through these sylvan arches the old wheel could be discerned splashing, splashing and scattering the water-drops about like some prodigal distributing fairy diamonds. The house attached to the mill was overgrown with ivy, and had a gable end, with latticed windows, which almost overhung the mill-stream. The holly hedge by which it was surrounded was neatly clipped, and like most miller's gardens, Ray's was a mass of flowers and shrubs.

It had been a rare sight at one time to have seen Jasper Jellifer away from his shop, except on business, but since his intimacy with Ray he might be found once, and even twice a-week in the dusk of the evening walking in the miller's garden, although he was known to care nothing for flowers, or indeed for little else in which he did not traffic.

"A primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more."

He was there one evening earnestly reading a book — it was bound in rough calf with a brass clasp — as he walked up and down, when a farmer rode up to the mill.

"Hallo!" cried the new-comer, looking over the garden hedge. "Jasper Jellifer, as I live! What are you studying, man — the Ready Reckoner, or the Art of Short Mensuration?"

"Neither, Master Spraggatt," replied Jasper, smiling, and putting the volume into his pocket. "I'm studying a leaf out of your book, Sir, and learning the art of being idle."

"You're too old and too knowing to go to my school," said Jack Spraggatt, dismounting and fastening his horse's bridle to a ring in the gate post. Before he could open the wicket, however, Jasper was at the entrance.

"Ray is at home, I suppose?" remarked Jack.

"Yes — I believe so — that is, he was here just now," answered Jasper, with some hesitation of manner, which, however, was not noticed by his questioner.

As Jack's business was with the miller and not with Jasper, for whom he entertained no great respect, the young man made his way at once for the house. As he did so he observed there was a light in the miller's parlour, or counting house, but on Jasper calling out, "Mr. Ray!" it was extinguished instantly. Jack thought nothing of this until he reached the door, when he heard the lid of an iron chest, which he knew stood in one corner of the miller's room, close with a noise, as though it had been shut down hastily.

"What's in the wind, I wonder?" thought Jack. "Jasper wouldn't be idling away his time here for

nothing, and Ray evidently did not want to make me as wise as himself."

Whatever the mystery, there was no reading it in the miller's face, for when he opened the door he looked as beaming and spoke as cheerily as any man could, who was fresh from the accomplishment of some good action.

"I hardly expected you here to-night, Mr. Spraggatt," said Ray; "but come in and try our last brewing. Unless," added the miller, opening the parlour door and leading the way, "you prefer a glass of French brandy or Dutch Hollands; I have both at hand."

Jack preferred the ale, and the miller's handmaiden soon brought in a foaming jug of nutbrown stingo which would have astonished the degenerate topers of bitter beer. Jack had come to make a bargain for the sale of some wheat, for which the miller had offered a price some shillings below its value. Buyers, however, were scarce, and Jack wanted money. So did Ray, at least that was his excuse for the badness of his offer, and he could only buy by borrowing at interest, and therefore the wheat must pay the loss.

Jack's need was urgent, for unless he paid some money at next day's market his credit would be damaged, if not lost altogether. Ray knew this also, and professed to become a purchaser more to oblige Mr. Spraggatt than from any hope of gain by the transaction. There was nothing for it but to take the

miller's price, and the little sample bag of wheat was drawn forth from Jack's pocket with a sigh that told a tale which few suspected who knew the light-hearted farmer on his daily walk, for Jack Spraggatt had a cheerful smile and pleasant word for all, even when night had brought no sleep, and the light but small comfort.

Ray had left the room to get so much of the money as was needed for the morrow, and Jasper Jellifer's presence at the mill was accounted for by the young farmer, when he heard the miller call his name.

Ray was absent a short time, and when he returned he brought with him a lighted candle, for the evening had closed in. The usual formalities gone through, and two hundred pounds safely deposited in the breast pocket of Jack's coat, he rose to take his departure.

As he did so, something sparkling on the ground caught his eye, and to his surprise he picked up a diamond ring — a lady's diamond ring.

"Ha! how careless of me," cried the miller, almost snatching the waif from Jack's fingers. "I would not have lost that ring for a hundred pounds. It was my — my mother's. Thank you, Mr. Spraggatt."

Jack knew the ring did not belong to him, and therefore believed the miller's story without further question, but Ray scarcely spoke another word until they reached the garden gate and bade each other good night.

Jack Spraggatt rode on with a full pocket and a heavy heart, for he knew that many bargains similar to the one he had made that evening would complete his ruin.

Jack had many friends, some of them true friends, as the world goes — and was always sure of a welcome. He had great natural spirits and a happy-looking face, two things which pass current for much more than they are worth too often. Many who had returned his cheery greeting or valediction had envied the happy Jack, and wondered how he managed to put aside Care, or to avoid the old carker altogether. Had they peeped under his hat as he rode or walked along, solitarily, they would have seen a bent brow and a sad face that told of sorrow hidden from all, perhaps, and known to himself alone. Whatever it was that was gnawing at his peace, like the Spartan boy, he hid his destroyer bravely.

To see Jack at his own table was to see him in his glory. His aged mother seated in the place of honour, and on either side a blooming sister, kindly careful of their frequent guests, whilst Jack filled a chair which death had made vacant some three years before our story, by taking away the kind grey headed man who had loved that household dearly — aye, too dearly.

No shade of sadness then! No word, no look to pain that widowed mother and those trusting sisters, nothing to mar the bright hopes that mingled ever with the talk of Letty's coming nuptials — she was

the elder of the two — or that sought to check the prodigal love which was so lavish in devising adornments for the happy bride. Ray's purchase would empty the bays of the great barn, and when that sorrow was passed, they should be covered over with green boughs and flowers, and all should

"Go merry as the marriage bells."

Yet Jack had a great skeleton in his cupboard — larger than that of the Irish giant — or the mastodon even, and it would come out in the still night and terrify him into wakefulness. It would greet him in early morning as soon as his eyes were open, it would often and often look at him from behind his mother's and sisters' chairs, and scare him for a moment; but Jack, by a cheerful look and merry word would drive it away, to meet it perhaps again when he smoked his pipe walking among the flowers in the garden, or sitting in the rose-covered porch, and at other times when he ought to have been most happy.

This grim attendant was none of Jack's own seeking. It was bequeathed to him by his father, who told him the day before he died never to let his mother see the unsightly thing, but to hide it from her, if possible, until the time came when she should lie down to rest in the green church-yard. Jack obeyed his father, although it made his young life at times a blank, and closed his heart against a love which knocked at it loudly for two long years, and which turned away at last to find another home. Now and

then, when the malign influence became almost intolerable, he had thought of asking Lucy — his favourite sister Lucy, to share with him in part this terrible knowledge; but fearing that it might become as fatal to her and to her peace, as it had long been to him and to his happiness, he elected to bear it alone, and until the end, if that were needful.

Jack found two neighbours awaiting his return from the mill, and a merry supper was the result. The young ladies and Jack were excellent singers of homely songs and glees and catches, and one of the guests prided himself on the profundity of his bass. So they sang some old part-songs, such as years and years ago the early tenant of that ancient dwelling had sung under the same oak roof-tree, and whose delighted ghosts perhaps still hovered around, and wagged their spectral jaws to an inaudible chorus.

Mrs. Spraggatt had retired to rest somewhat before the party broke up, although the clock struck ten only as the two guests departed. Jack went to his little sitting-room, adjoining the one they had just left, with the intention of depositing his money in an oak box where he kept his account books, but found that his mother had the key. As she was now asleep, possibly, he took his treasure to bed with him. The mirthfulness of the last hour or two had scared Jack's skeleton into its cupboard, and the young farmer soon fell into a sound but short slumber. When he awoke, the moonlight was shining on his face, and had helped to

rouse him, he thought. Rasper, the house-dog, was barking at intervals down at the homestead, but that was his custom, whenever Jack forgot to unloosen him, and he had done so that night. The weather cock on the pigeon-house was creaking sadly. That was strange! because Jack had seen it oiled not a week ago. Yet it did creak, and that continuously. There was a fox or a strange dog about the place, no doubt, for Rasper was very noisy, and Jack had half a mind to get out of bed and silence him, but sleep was stealing over him, the creaking of the weather-cock had ceased, and so what evil was at work that night remained unseen by Jack Spraggatt.

He found it out in the morning, however, and fearing to alarm his mother and his sisters, never talked of it until years and years afterwards, when he and one other were alone in a far-off land — alone in a great wilderness sitting at night by a bright wood fire.

Jack discovered in the morning that two men (there were the foot-prints of two men) had filed the catch of the window of his little room — (he thought it was the creaking of the weather-cock), and having entered, had forced open the lid of his oak box, and thrown all his books and papers upon the ground. Nothing else was disturbed. Nothing stolen.

Jack replaced his books and papers, took off the catch of the window, and thought how good a thing it was to have friendly neighbours look in to compel one

to make merry sometimes in spite of oneself. Had Mrs. Spraggatt not taken the key of the oak box to bed with her, Jack would have lost the bank-notes he had obtained at such a sacrifice.

CHAPTER III.

Jasper Jellifer Proposes to Play for a Great Stake, and the Miller Shares the Risk.

Norwold Hall, the residence of Sir John Norwold, was a fine old building, of somewhat later date than Elizabeth's time, but partaking of some of the architectural characteristics of that period, when fortified houses were growing into disuse, although the great mansions still preserved traces of caution, and appearance of strength. Its large bay windows were partly filled with stained glass, depicting the armorial bearings of the house of Norwold, and of those families who had been united to it by marriage in the time of its greater prosperity — its fortunes were more humble at the time of our story. In its great hall, cavaliers had mustered to do battle for King Charles, and many keen sportsmen had gathered, often "to boot, and to saddle," and to "burn powder" in sylvan warfare. The grounds about the hall had been extensive at one time, and there was still much that told of their past glories. Thick yew hedges, broad enough to allow the construction of bowers in their midst, proclaimed themselves to be the growth of more than one century, and there were terraces of green turf, whereon, so tradition said, Henrietta had once walked in queenly pride and beauty, and many other stately dames, also, in after

time, when Norwold Hall had been the scene of a large hospitality. The approach to the house was by a gentle rise, and through an avenue of noble trees, once all but condemned to become timber, by the needy politician who had lately held possession, but family pride cancelled the sentence. The park was only separated from the town of Morden by a stream which flowed through it, turning Ray's mill in its course to the adjoining river.

Many of the smaller houses in Morden were the property of Sir John Norwold. They had been bought by the present Sir John's father for election purposes, and were invariably occupied by "free men," who, when tractable, were desirable tenants before the Reform Bill deprived them of much of their birth-rights. The management of those political serfs had been long intrusted to one David Locke, a small corn-dealer, but a shrewd fellow, and a first-rate pot-house politician. He was in his way a diminutive "man in the moon," and managed matters so cleverly, that his votes defied scrutiny. The borough had been frequently and hotly contested, but David Locke's man was always at the head of the poll, and the means by which his victories were obtained were never doubted. He brought up his men in shoals whenever occasion required them, and he ticked them off as they polled with most annoying effrontery. His mode of bargaining was unique and open. The Rock Club, held at a small public-house in Morden, was composed of certain free and independents who were banded together for their

own interests and security, contriving by their combination to keep up the price of votes and prevent any underselling of each other. On the eve of an election, the Club met, and invited Mr. David Locke to attend, and state the political opinions of his candidate. When pipes and beer, those necessary adjuncts to deliberation, had been supplied, Mr. David Locke rose, stick in hand, and proceeded to business.

"Gentlemen of the Rock Club," he would say, "I am here to solicit your votes and interest for Mr. Blank. As time is of consequence to all of us, I will at once state the opinions of my principal. He is a man of his word, and his political opinions extend to —." Here he would give two blows with his stick upon the table.

This declaration would be always highly unsatisfactory to the meeting, and loud cries of "Oh! no! that won't do!" compelled the orator to proceed.

"Mr. Blank, gentlemen, is not an obstinate man, unwilling to be guided in some way by the opinions of his constituents, and therefore, I do not hesitate to say for him" — three blows with the stick followed by more dissatisfaction.

"There is reason in roasting eggs," Mr. Locke would continue, "and, gentlemen, I can assure you, that Mr. Blank will retire from the contest — and will do so with my concurrence, and by my advice, unless you are satisfied with" — five blows of the stick.

The fathers of the club would then put their wicked old heads together, and whisper mysteriously for a few

minutes. During their deliberation, Mr. David Locke resumed his hat, buttoned up his coat, every button, and placing his divining rod under his arm, awaited calmly the result of the conference. If the chairman of the club then struck five times upon the table, Mr. David Locke again removed his hat, and repeated the mystic number of blows. If on the other hand the chairman exceeded that number by only one tap, Mr. David Locke looked his contempt of the assembly, and retired without a word. Need we say, that the blows upon the table indicated the number of guineas at which Mr. Locke was willing to have those political brutes knocked down to him?

The late Baronet, Sir Robert Norwold, had been a great House of Commons man, and had contested three elections for Morden, paying so dearly for his whistle, that when he died, his estate was found to be greatly encumbered. Sir John, his son and successor, set to work to get back as much of his father's outlay in bribery as he could by pinching his tenants to the uttermost. Those free and independent persons had been so long used to pay their rent in kind, that it was no easy matter to make them recognise the new order of things, and pay in money; and Mr. David Locke found his political influence diminishing daily by the intrusion of the broker and his myrmidons into the dwellings of the recusant tenants. But being one of those practical philosophers who decide that half a loaf is better than none, Mr. Locke, determined to take care of himself, had arranged with Sir John Norwold to allow him a

good commission for collecting his rents in specie and promises; so after awhile matters went on pretty smoothly.

We have said thus much of Mr. David Locke, as a sudden illness threatened to close his rather equivocal career, and leave his collectorship open to a successor. The precarious condition of Mr. Locke was known to very few persons only, and Jasper Jellifer was one. The collectorship had been long desired by the persevering Jasper, and had Mr. Locke's illness not been so sudden and dangerous, he had intended to have devised some plan to have obtained, at some future day, the reversion.

Jasper Jellifer had always been a lucky man, and fortune had not tired of serving him. Sir John Norwold was well known to be a proud, selfish, overbearing man, and most of his deeds of good or evil were referable to the state of his temper for the time being. Jasper was afraid of Sir John.

Lady Norwold was a second wife, and had been promoted to that position from a respectable but rather humble condition, and her recognition by Sir John was more that of a superior housekeeper than of one whom he had promised to endow with all his worldly goods, and to cherish and comfort to the end of their mutual lives. It seemed, therefore, hardly possible to induce a lady so circumstanced, to interfere on behalf of a person who was only known to her as a small tradesman that occasionally received the honour of her custom.

But Jasper Jellifer was a lucky man, and a letter of introduction was put into his hand by the postman. It bore the Cambridge post-mark, and the handwriting appeared familiar to him. He retired into his back parlour before breaking the seal, and was gratified to find that the letter was from Gilbert Norwold. It was earnestly worded, and urgently requested the immediate loan of 200*l.* The largeness of the amount made Jasper start. The letter went on to say, "So great is the necessity for this money that I am sure my mother, Lady Norwold, will guarantee the repayment when I can explain circumstances to her. My brother Gerard is also so concerned in this matter that he will give his written undertaking to see the money repaid. I shall follow this letter to-morrow and be with you at night, when I trust to find you prepared to help me." Jasper read and re-read the letter, and then thought over the course he should pursue. To lend so large a sum, even if he had the money, on such security, would be absurd. Nevertheless the letter empowered him to see Lady Norwold; and out of an interview and the knowledge of her son's necessities, something might arise to obtain her intercession with Sir John for the desired collectorship. He dressed himself in his best, and started at once for the Hall. He walked briskly, and as he passed under the grand old trees which formed the avenue leading to the house, visions of future advancement and larger gains presented themselves. The collectorship once obtained, other trusts might follow, and some day Jasper Jellifer might aspire to be stew-

ard of the Norwold properties. Two hundred pounds was a large sum to invest on such a dream. A spendthrift's promise was soon forgotten, and Lady Norwold was slenderly dowered. A quarter of that sum would show his willingness to help, and give him a hold upon the lady's gratitude. Well, there was time enough to decide, after he had seen her ladyship. He went to the servant's entrance, but as it was forbidden to have strangers in the offices, he was shown into the great Hall, there to wait until Sir John and Lady Norwold had finished breakfast. As he sat there, patiently, he fancied he heard Sir John speaking loud and angrily and when the door of the breakfast room was opened by the footman who had been in attendance, his conjecture was confirmed. The footman shrugged his shoulders, and made a grimace at Jasper, whom he knew, saying:

"The old game! Sir John's in a towering rage — his temper gets worse and worse. You haven't come to see him, I hope?"

"No," replied Jasper; "but I want to see her ladyship very particular."

"I don't expect she'll see you or anybody this morning — she never does after these rows. I don't envy 'her ladyship,' I can tell you," said the footman.

"What's the matter?" asked Jasper.

"Oh, the old story — money. Master Gerard has writ home for £50, and Sir John has gone into fits about it. He says it's all Master Gilbert's fault a setting him a bad example, and that Lady Norwold encourages 'em in extravagance. Hark! he's a coming

out," and the prudent footman retreated with an alacrity that was surprising, considering his full condition.

The door of the breakfast-room was thrown open by Sir John, who paused to say:

"Now write and tell them so, Madam. Tell them both that I'll not give them a pound more than their allowance. If I do ——" here followed a coarse expletive which at that time was not so uncommon as to be thought brutal, even by those to whom it was addressed.

Jasper wished himself back in the market-place, but retreat was impossible.

"Well, who are you?" cried Sir John. "Oh, I see! the chandler's shop-keeper — Well, what do you want?"

Jasper was nearly bewildered, but as the collectorship was uppermost in his head, he stammered out — "Mr. Locke, Sir John, is dangerously ill — dying, I believe, Sir John ——."

"So much the better!" interrupted the fiery old gentleman. "If he had died forty years ago it would have been all the better for me. An old bribery-monger. How do you know he's dying?"

"Please, Sir John, the doctor was with him three times yesterday ——."

"That's enough — sent any message to me?"

"No, Sir John, but ——"

"Then why the devil do you stop me here talking ——." Luckily for Jasper, at this moment the

gardener's boy was discerned by the passionate Baronet wheeling a barrow across the lawn, and as this was a proceeding strictly against orders, Sir John rushed out, his angry voice and the howling of the boy giving assurance that the prohibition was being forcibly impressed on the memory of the delinquent. Jasper sank down upon the hall-settle, almost resolved to abandon the coveted interview, but the fear of meeting Sir John on his way through the park kept him sitting. At last, to Jasper's great relief, he saw the dreaded old gentleman ride down the avenue, and if the truth be told, he cared not whither.

When Lady Norwold passed into the hall, Jasper noticed that she had been weeping, but his self-interest was too much concerned to admit of any display of delicacy on his part. He, therefore, advanced towards her, almost calling, "My lady!" Lady Norwold stopped, and Jasper instantly opened his business.

"I beg pardon, my lady, but I want to speak to your ladyship for a few minutes."

"I am rather indisposed, Mr. Jellifer, just now and must trouble you to call again ——."

"But my business is very pressing, my lady," said Jasper. "I have a letter from your son, Mr. Gilbert."

"From my son?" said Lady Norwold. "My son written to you? Pray follow me," and she led the way into a small room which she usually occupied when alone.

"Did I understand you rightly, that you had a letter from my son, Mr. Gilbert?" asked her ladyship,

seating herself as though her anxiety already oppressed her.

"Yes, my lady," replied Jasper. "A letter which has perplexed me a great deal, I can assure your ladyship; and I thought it my duty to come on to you at once, my lady. Here is the letter, which will speak for itself."

Lady Norwold drew a deep sigh before she ventured to read a communication which, she feared, would bring her more sorrow. As she read on, large tears fell upon the paper, and when she had finished she hid her face in her handkerchief and sobbed aloud. Jasper was very sorry to witness her distress, for he thought he could not very well touch upon the collectorship at present, and he dreaded the return of Sir John.

"This is a very sad, sad letter," said Lady Norwold, after a pause of some moments, "and will go nigh to break my heart, unless Gilbert has some satisfactory explanation to give. What do you propose to do, Mr. Jellifer? Is it in your power to help my unhappy boy?"

"Why really, your ladyship," said Jasper, hardly expecting such a point blank question so early in the interview, "I assure your ladyship that it is quite out of my power to do what Mr. Gilbert requires."

"Then why did you come to me? Why did you come to give me pain, if you have not the power to help my poor son?"

Jasper saw all his new-blown hopes fading away if he hesitated.

"Your ladyship would not hear me to an end," said Jasper. "I was about to say that I would see Mr. Gilbert, and hear if he really wants so much as £200. If fifty would help him, and I have your ladyship's promise of repayment, I would try — yes, I would try to advance that sum."

"Thanks, Mr. Jellifer — Mr. Gilbert must make that sum sufficient, for I do not hesitate to tell you that Sir John is tired of supplying his sons' — both his sons' — extravagances, and that I am myself subjected to much annoyance on their account. Sir John is very unreasonable at times, and is not particular upon whom he vents his ill temper. I knew when you gave me that letter that it was about money. As I read how dear Gilbert's imprudence was distressing him, poor boy, and saw how large was the amount required to release him from his difficulties, I was perfectly overcome, knowing that I am almost penniless at present. Mr. Jellifer, you will do your best in this unhappy business, and I promise you shall be repaid. Of course I depend upon your honourable secresy, and —— have you anything else to say?"

Yes, Jasper had, and he intimated as much by his manner, when he saw her ladyship about to leave the room.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon for detaining you," said Jasper; "but Mr. David Locke, Sir John's collector of rents in Morden, is dying."

"Poor old Mr. Locke dying, indeed! Well!"

"I am most anxious to have the appointment at his death, and if your ladyship would intercede for me with Sir John, I should be deeply grateful."

"Mr. Jellifer, I will say what I can for you. You know — all the world in fact knows — what a strange temper Sir John is, but he has his lucid intervals, and I will avail myself of one of them to prefer your suit. Good morning — though, Mr. Jellifer, I must make one condition."

"Pray name it, your ladyship!" said Jasper, thoroughly satisfied and delighted.

"You must let Mr. Gilbert have a hundred pounds. Tell him, from me, that he must do with that! Good morning" —— and her ladyship glided from the room.

She had always been a cold, selfish woman, and married Sir John, her senior by many years, for position, relentlessly breaking whole quires of written vows of constancy and love to one who had believed them. Her married life would have been an unhappy one had she coveted a husband's love, or a wife's place in her husband's home; but, asking neither, finding neither, she had concentrated all the woman's nature she possessed on her only child, ever seeking his advantage at the expense of his brother Gerard, using mean trickery and double dealing to secure her ends, and too frequently employing the agency of her own child, until she had made him as selfish, deceitful, and dishonourable as herself.

The last condition of Lady Norwold was not over

acceptable to Jasper, but as he walked down the grand old avenue his former dreams of greatness and profit returned, and he resolved to consult his friend the miller.

Ray, he knew, had been to London, but would return by the mid-day coach, and he might as well call upon him at once, and not wait until the evening for the settlement of some matter of business between them. So Jasper sat down on a bench in the garden to await his friend's return.

We have hitherto said nothing of Jasper's wife, and although she will have little to do with our story for some time to come, she is a person not to be altogether overlooked. Jasper had smuggled her, almost, into Morden, for none knew of his wooing or of his marriage, and the lady herself was a stranger to every one. She was rather a showy person to be Jasper Jellifer's wife, but she proved to be an industrious woman, and drove as hard a bargain, and loved money as dearly as did her husband. Her maiden name she told to many, had been Harrison, and it was by her introduction, it was said, that Ray and Jasper had become friends. Some persons, indeed, fancied they could trace a family resemblance between Ray and Mrs. Jellifer, but people in country towns will have strange fancies.

Ray returned punctually by the mid-day coach, and he and Jasper were soon closely closeted together. Ray's jovial laugh came now and then pealing through the open window, overpowering poor Jasper's feeble

chuckle, which rarely had an independent innings. An hour or so had passed when Gregory, the miller's man, was summoned to the house, and desired to witness the signatures of the two friends to a paper which had been prepared in London. The man was rather frightened, as persons of his class frequently are, when asked "to put their names to paper;" but Ray for some reason, and despite his *bonhomie*, was not a person any one would willingly disoblige when he required a service of them.

"Now have a glass of wine, Jerry, if only to impress this matter upon your memory," said Ray; "and I hope it may be a long day before you are required to give your evidence."

Both friends laughed in concert, and Jerry grinned and drank off the wine, and never forgot to his dying day the signing of that paper.

"Your mind is at ease now, I hope," said Ray, when Jerry had left the room; "by to-morrow's post the other deed will arrive, and when that is signed, sealed, and delivered, all will be straight between us."

The next day Jerry was again summoned, but no wine was forthcoming, and for that reason among others, he remembered when his head was grey the signing of the second paper also, when Mr. Ray was the miller at Norwold Mill.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Jellifer Provides an Offering, and Ray, the Miller, Officiates as a Priest of Mammon.

THOSE who remember the old coaching days — forgetting, perhaps, many of their discomforts, delays and dangers — are wont to contrast them favourably, with the hurry, noise, and monotony of a journey by rail. It was certainly a pleasant change for the daily worker, whether student, trader, or craftsman, to find himself seated on a well-appointed four-horse coach whirling along through pleasant country scenes, such as England presents, whichever way we travel, silently enjoying the ever changing landscape, now of broad cultivated plains, rich with their promised or accomplished harvests; now of great moorlands, golden with the blossoms of the furze, or purple with the flowers of the heather; the distance studded with farmer's homesteads or lordly mansions, and changing then to the glorious woodlands, watered by noble rivers or placid streams, until the wearied mind forgot its toils and cares, and felt that the beauteous earth might indeed have been a Paradise. The fresh breeze came like the breath of health, and made the pulse beat quicker, whilst the brisk clatter of the dashing team became a cadence that was almost music. The entrance of the coach into the country town or little village

was an event to be regarded. The busiest and the idle, the old and the young, had eyes for nothing else, and every passenger, on the outside at least, felt "a lion" for the moment. What delicious ale you drank at the Change! What luscious ham and delicate fowls you ate at the dinner, and what a princely price you paid for the enjoyment. You pay as nobly now, but *minus* the pleasure. Then the after weed! When did a cigar ever seem so fragrant, so etherial, as when smoked upon a coach-box, with no better companion at your side than the chatty coachman, whose skill you admired, and whose universal popularity you almost envied. Mr. Babbage, that sorely tormented gentleman (may his tormentors eat dirt! — by the bye, they do that), would have forgiven the strong-lunged guard for the melody produced by his straight horn or key bugle, and paid his tip at the end of the journey with the readiness of gratitude. Soho! our ride by coach is ended, and what is written may seem rhapsodies, but many shared them on the day when Gilbert Norwold obtained his "exeat," and left Cambridge for Morden.

The ride was a dreary one for him, and when he arrived in London he almost determined to retrace his road, and dare Gerard to his worst rather than proceed on his humiliating mission. He thought, however, that Gerard would not be diverted from the resolution he had expressed to see restitution made; and he knew that his father would feel the family honour compromised, and against that conviction his parental affection

would weigh as a grain of sand. So, he must on to Morden, and purchase his redemption from Jasper Jellifer at whatever price he might be pleased to require for the service to be rendered.

The coach would arrive about nine o'clock, and to avoid recognition, Gilbert had requested Jasper to meet him with his covered cart about a mile from the Elms, and his request had been obeyed.

As Gilbert had made frequently secret runs home, the guard and coachman (to whom he was well known), were not surprised at this arrangement, and both knew their business too well to allude to the circumstance when they made the next change at Morden.

"Well, Jellifer," said Gilbert, as soon as they were seated in the cart, "are you ready with the money?"

The inquiry was somewhat abrupt, but Jasper was undisturbed by it, and the more especially as he was not about to ask any favour from Gilbert.

"The sum you require is far above my means," he replied — "very far, and you ought to have known that, sir."

"I don't believe you, Jasper; that's flat!" said Gilbert. "I am sure you must have the money; but I suppose now that you know the infernal strait I am in, you want to play the Shylock. You need not hesitate to ask your price — I am prepared to pay liberally; that is, to promise to pay, and my brother Gerard will do the same."

"I tell you once again, sir, that I have not the

power to help you to so much as 200*l.* I saw her ladyship this morning."

"Ah! What did she say?"

"She was very much cut up, sir, when I told her what you had written about. Very much cut up:" said Jasper, with emotion.

"She always cries before she puts her hand in her pocket, I know," replied Gilbert. "But she gave you her security?"

"Not so; she has given me no security, because I told her as I tell you, I have not the money."

"Then you must borrow it," cried Gilbert, much excited by Jasper's coolness and protestations. "My honour, my future welfare, is concerned, and you must find me the money, you cold-blooded fellow."

"I am not what you call me, Mr. Gilbert, and I will prove it to you at once. I offered to give you all the money I have — some 50*l.* or so, and your lady mother said that you must make that sufficient, as —"

"How can she know what is sufficient?" cried Gilbert. "She ought to be able to manage better, and make Sir John more liberal with his money. I tell you once for all 50*l.* is of no use to me."

"'You *may* make it a hundred,' said her ladyship, 'and I will see you paid;' and being anxious to serve you, sir, and her ladyship, I have been to my friend Mr. Ray — the miller, sir — and he hopes to be able to make up another fifty pounds to mine. We will go down this lane, and then cross the river in a boat.

My cart would be known in the market place, and people would wonder what business I had at the mill so late at night."

Gilbert sat silent for some minutes, and then said:

"A hundred pounds, eh? Hm! — Gerard will get fifty from Sir John, and that might be made sufficient."

"You must not calculate upon that, sir," said Jasper. "As I was sitting in the Hall this morning, I could not help hearing Sir John desire her ladyship to write to you both, and refuse your brother the money."

Gilbert swore a strong oath for so young a man, but he had been accustomed to hear such phrases from his father's mouth.

"Please, don't swear in such a fearful way, sir," said Jasper. "I am not a religious man, but we are about to cross the river in a boat, and I don't like the water even by day-light."

By this time they had reached an old boat-house on the banks of the river, and Jasper had made all needful preparations, as a boy was waiting to ferry them across to Norwold Park, after the horse had been put up at a neighbouring stable.

The night was star-light, and the fine old Hall looked grand amid its surrounding of stately trees as Gilbert and Jasper walked under the shadow of the park palings to Norwold Mill. They found Ray waiting for them at the garden gate, and the miller rais-

ing his hat to Gilbert, led the way to the house in silence.

The room they entered was the one in which Jack Spraggatt had found the ring, but now the shutters were closed, and thick red curtains drawn before them. Supper was laid upon the table, and as the evening had been unusually chilly, a bright wood fire was burning, and both were heartily welcomed by the two wayfarers. The miller's pleasant manner and cheerful face was not lost upon Gilbert, and he soon went heartily to work at the excellent supper provided for the party. No word was spoken on the matter which had called them together until the table being cleared and the materials for grog brought in, the domestic was dismissed for the night.

Ray broke ground.

"Mr. Jellifer has told me, sir, of your wants, and of his own inability to meet them, and has come to me, who am quite as poor as himself, to help in the matter."

Gilbert bowed slightly, and said, "Just so. I understand that Mr. Jellifer has explained my present position to you, and that you have kindly undertaken to help me, if you can."

"That 'if,'" said the miller, "is the difficulty."

The clock in the passage struck eleven.

Jasper rose hastily, and said that as his wife, who knew nothing of this business, would be alarmed at his absence, and possibly be making inquiries for him, he begged to be allowed to go.

Ray knew all the particulars, and Mr. Gilbert had arranged to remain at the mill until the early morning, when Jasper was to call for him with the covered cart. As there was no reason why he should remain, Ray saw him to the garden gate, and after a few minutes returned to his guest.

"To tell the truth," said he. "I am glad Jellifer has left us. He is a good fellow enough, but he has seen nothing of the world, and has all the narrow prejudices of a provincial shopkeeper. Your grog is not to your liking, I'm afraid, sir?"

Gilbert assured him that it was capital, and the miller went on, having first produced some cigars of excellent quality.

"I do not wish to force myself upon your confidence, or to take advantage of what I already know, but being a burnt child myself, I am very anxious to help you if I can." He paused for a few moments, and then continued. "If I had had an adviser when young, I should not be a huckstering miller, nor the intimate of such a man as Jasper Jellifer; but I made one mistake, and was unforgiven — turned out into the world to fight the battle of life — to sink or swim, as best I could. I know what I have suffered, and seen what others have suffered also."

There was silence, and both sat looking at the bright fire.

"I have no right to say more," continued the miller — "no right to ask you to tell me anything; but the

sum you — a young man — require is so large, and the need of it so urgent, that —" he paused.

"That, what?" asked Gilbert.

"That I would make a great effort to help you, if I believed it would save you from the evil consequences of a boyish folly."

Gilbert was touched by Ray's tone, and kindly manner almost more than by his words, and he said, "Thank you, thank you, Mr. Ray. The money would indeed save me from a very painful difficulty."

"Yet you will not trust me, because I am not your equal. Is it not so?"

"That is not my reason," replied Gilbert; "on my honour, no! and I will hesitate no longer. I only desire that what I say, be not communicated to Jellifer, or indeed to any other person."

Ray gave the required assurance, and Gilbert continued:

"I have a brother as you know, a half brother only, and older than myself. He is up at Cambridge with me. Our pursuits, our habits, are widely different; and whilst he, I believe, is considered a thoroughly good fellow, I am regarded by his set as a rather loose fish. I accept the distinction, because I know I deserve it. Gerard rarely touches a card, and I am fond of play, and latterly I have —, I have —"

"Lost your money," remarked Ray, as Gilbert made a pause.

"No; I have won somewhat largely, and principally of a freshman."

"Well, no harm in that," said Ray, as Gilbert again ceased speaking.

"You are mistaken; all the harm I fear is from that cause. 'Easy got, easy go,' is an old adage, and so it has been with my winnings. Pressing debts, and some fresh extravagancies, have disposed of all my gains. That had been all very well; but this is my difficulty: my good and worthy brother has come to know of the matter — how, does not signify — and because my opponent chances to be a rich young fool, Gerard desires me to restore the fellow his losings, and that forthwith; pretending that our family honour, or some such nonsense, is concerned."

"And what, if you refuse to comply with such an unreasonable request?" asked Ray, with a smile.

"The blackguard threatens to tell my father, knowing his ungovernable temper, and that he would turn me out of doors as likely as not; for I have never been a favourite with him, and he has forbidden us, again and again I own, to play for money."

"Would your brother do this, think you?"

"Yes — remorselessly. He has said he would, even when I pleaded for my mother. He is sneak enough to keep his word," answered Gilbert.

"Your position is indeed desperate!" said Ray, with a sigh; "for I know of what evil things your *good* young man is capable. It was a 'good young man' that made my father close his door on me, and changed the whole purpose of my life. You want £200?"

"Yes. Jellifer will advance £50, and Gerard wrote home for fifty more, and has been refused."

"That I know, as Jasper saw your mother this morning, after a stormy breakfast with Sir John," said Ray. "I wish I were rich enough to help you; from my soul I do; but I have a hard fight to keep my place, poor as it is. However, I have not asked this confidence without a reason. Had you needed this money for any ordinary purpose, I should have added a little to Jasper's loan, and so have ended. But your case is too desperate to hesitate, from false delicacy, perhaps, to tell you what can be done. Your brother has everything to gain by your exposure; but from some sense of decency he has made this home request for money, knowing it would be refused, and proposed to give his security to Jasper, knowing it to be worthless, has he not? I guessed at something of this, and therefore have not been idle in your behalf, although only partially successful. Fill your glass again, Mr. Gilbert, and then I will tell you all that can be done."

Ray made up the fire, and threw on another log or two, muttering audibly as he did so, "Poor young fellow!" He then seated himself, and said:

"I have been to London on this matter, Mr. Gilbert, unknown to Jellifer. I have brought back the money, and here it is in this pocket-book. It is at your service conditionally, and pray bear in mind that the terms I am about to propose are not mine, but of the man from whom the money comes. Were it mine,

there should be none. I have obtained one hundred and fifty pounds from a money-lender — one of the most cautious of his class. He has known me long, too long for my advantage, but as I never deceived him, he will at all times take my word, and not my security. He knows my real circumstances too well. Yet, as I say, he will trust to my word and to my honour. He will lend you this money on one condition only. Mind it is he who speaks. He will have some tangible security, such, as he says, Lady Norwold can easily give if she be so minded. She must have jewels, diamonds, and those he will have, or I am bound to return him this money."

Gilbert started from his seat, exclaiming, "Impossible! She will not risk my father's anger."

"She will," said Ray, calmly; "she will, when she knows it will save her son from the ruin which is before him. Sit down, sir, and let us talk quietly. Reflect — has Lady Norwold no jewels which she seldom wears. Your family will not go to town until Christmas, and before that time your mother can easily obtain — for women have great tact — the money from your father to redeem any pledge she may now give. Reflect — has she nothing that you can ask her to lend you at this terrible emergency?"

"Yes — she has one ornament which she rarely wears — a diamond bracelet given her by Sir John, I have heard her say, shortly after they were married," replied Gilbert.

"Ask her to lend you that," said Ray, coolly.

"But how to see her, even if I wait until to-morrow? I dare not go to the Hall, and she is not always at liberty to leave home."

"Go to her to-night," said Ray. "She and Sir John occupy separate chambers — do they not? — whenever there has been a domestic breeze, and one blew pretty stiffly this morning, I hear. It has been whispered, Mr. Gilbert, that you could find your way into Norwold Hall without troubling the porter." And the miller smiled.

"I thought that secret was known only to myself," answered Gilbert, smiling also, and colouring deeply. "There is an entrance, but then one door will be locked to-night, and I have not the key."

"Where there's a will there's a way," said the miller, laughing, and going to one corner of the room where a portrait hung. "Secret for secret, Mr. Gilbert. Here is my Hassarac's cavern. Open Sesame!" As he spoke he pressed upon the moulding of the picture frame, the canvas flew up, and disclosed a very shallow recess behind it. "A present this, from my old friend the money-lender, and I use it for odds and ends that else would get astray. Here are some keys of various sizes. One of them perhaps, may remove your difficulty."

Gilbert looked at the bunch; there were some dozen or so, and at last selected three which appeared to be available. The ring to which they were attached was rusted, however, and would not open.

"Take them as they are," said the miller, "and re-

member what you have at stake. Home and fortune, or a life of struggle, not ending perhaps — in a mill."

The moon shone very brightly, and the stars glistened like the eyes of angels, when Gilbert Norwold entered the grand old avenue to steal into his father's house like a thief in the night. Again and again his heart failed him, but all that Ray had spoken came back to him, hissing in his ears, and roused him to proceed.

The door through which he had often passed secretly at night, was in the wall of a small yard, which had been formerly used for poultry by the first Lady Norwold; but had been long neglected. From the roof of a small building within it, Gilbert could reach a stair-case window which was without a fastening, and through this he had passed often and often. The lock of the door was of the commonest construction, and one of the keys he had readily opened it.

He soon reached the roof of the neglected aviary, and walked along it towards the window which had frequently given him access to the house when he had been absent without the knowledge of, or against the wish of his father. As he drew nearer to the house, his shadow rose up before him on the wall, as though to warn him of impending danger, or to drive him back from the commission of a crime. It startled him for a moment, but again the miller's words — "Home and fortune — a life of struggle," — came back to him, and he opened the window.

When Gilbert Norwold stood in his father's house his heart beat violently, and he felt how mean an act he was committing. How many a wretched hour had he spared himself and others, had he listened to the still small voice within that called to him to go back.

Noiselessly, as one stealing to do murder, did he approach his mother's dressing-room. The thick curtains shut out the moonlight, and he was afraid to proceed until he had carefully withdrawn the hangings and let it in. Silently he reached the door of the bed-chamber, and found it locked. He tapped once, only once, upon the panel, and as no one spoke, he feared to knock again, thinking his mother could not be in that room.

What was to become of him? If all that Ray had suggested should come to pass! If Gerard should be the false-hearted treacherous brother that he had made him appear to be! If he could have seen his mother alone but for a few minutes, he knew her love for him was so strong, herself so weak, that she would have yielded to his prayers for assistance. What now was to be done?

The moonlight streaming through the half-opened curtains fell full upon the small cabinet wherein his mother kept her trinkets. The thought which passed through his mind when he saw this, almost deprived him of the power to move. There was deliverance behind those painted doors. Again the words of Ray came back to him — Homeless! Portionless! and all by the word of a false brother. His hand almost in-

stinctively sought the keys in his pocket; he drew them forth — one, two, three, were tried without effect. Again he paused in his guilty work, and again Ray's words were in his ears. His mother would save him did she know all. He would tell her all to-morrow or the next day, when he would write to her. A key was found at last, one painted door was opened, and there, on the little shelf where he had seen it lie so often, was the bracelet case. He opened it, took out the bracelet, and returned the case. His brain was numbed now, and his heart almost still, but the click of the closing lock set both at work again. How he reached the park he could not remember, but he must have returned the way he had entered, as he found the keys in his hand. Uttering a sharp cry, he hurled them away, and running down the avenue, would have fallen to the ground, had not Ray suddenly advanced to him from the shadow of some trees which stood near the pathway leading from the park to the mill.

It was some minutes before Gilbert could proceed, even with the assistance of Ray, who kept silent, fearing to provoke a return of his young friend's faintness, by any inopportune question.

When they had entered the miller's parlour, where the fire still burned brightly, Gilbert burst into tears and laid his head upon the table. Ray did not speak for some time, not until the sobbing ceased.

"Has the interview been so painful?" he asked.

"Oh, most painful! most painful! never to be forgotten from this hour by me. Say no more, sir. It is

over! There is the bracelet." He almost threw it upon the table, and Ray, who did not care to increase Gilbert's distress, took it up and examined it carefully. It was of diamond work surrounding a portrait of Sir John Norwold. Ray held it in his hand for some time, and a smile of satisfaction passed over his pleasant features.

Gilbert sat with his face covered by his hands, and so Ray proceeded to count out £200, and to write some memoranda on a sheet of paper.

"Now, sir," he said at length, "Jasper's cart will be here directly, and we may as well conclude our painful business. There are notes for £200, and I must trouble you to give me your brother's undertaking for Jellifer, and to sign these memoranda for the other money. They are receipts for these two sums, and here is another signed by me acknowledging the possession of this bracelet, and the amount, £200, for which it is pledged. Mr. Jellifer will arrange his own charge for interest."

Gilbert did not observe the cold vicious tone in which Ray now addressed him, but signed the papers, and gave Ray Gerard's letter acknowledging his responsibility. He had scarcely finished when Jasper's covered cart drove up to the mill, and Gilbert shaking the miller warmly by the hand, joined the clever agent, who had helped him to such a generous friend as Miller Ray.

When the miller returned to the house, he saw that Gilbert had left the paper acknowledging Ray's

possession of the bracelet behind him. Ray shook his head, and placing the paper in his cash-box, opened his Hassarac's cavern and deposited them within it. The bracelet, and the receipt signed by Gilbert, he put into his pocket, no doubt intending to give them to the money-lender, who had such remarkable reliance on his word and honour.

On the evening of the next day, Gilbert Norwold entered his brother's rooms at Cambridge his whole appearance so changed, that to any one slightly acquainted with him, he would have been hardly recognisable. His face so haggard that the deepened lines added years to its expression, whilst his curved shoulders seemed bent down by the weight of the heavy heart within. He did not offer to sit down, and hardly accepted the hand his brother Gerard extended to him. Gerard was surprised and pained at the change, and more so when Gilbert said in a low hollow voice: —

"I have brought back the money. Jellifer lent me £50 on your security. For the rest I am indebted to my mother. I leave you to settle with Mariott."

"My dear Gilbert, you are ill," said his brother. "Is it fatigue, or have you had words at home?"

"I am fatigued," replied Gilbert. "I have not closed my eyes since I left Cambridge. Our father's honour — your honour — is preserved."

"And yours also, dear brother," said Gerard, taking Gilbert's hand. As he did so he felt that a shudder passed through his brother's frame, and saw

that on his forehead large drops of sweat came suddenly and fast.

"Lie down on my bed. You are ill; I am sure you are," said Gerard. "Let me send for the doctor."

Gilbert instantly appeared to rouse himself, and replied: "No necessity for that, Gerard. My interview with — with Jellifer and his friend, who advanced the money, was long and humiliating. It lasted throughout the night, and I have travelled here since I saw them — I will go to my own rooms. You will see Mariott. I conclude I need not ask you to spare me as much as possible. You will do that, however, for your own sake. There are two hundred pounds in notes."

"I suppose," said Gerard, unwilling to reply to his brother's taunt — "I suppose the terms exacted by the lenders are somewhat hard."

"Yes," answered Gilbert: a shuddering shook him this time unnoticed by his brother. "You may know some day what it is to be in desperate need and wanting a helping friend. When that time comes, Gerard, remember how sharp the ordeal has been to which you condemned me."

"I condemned you?"

"Yes, you — my brother. Your wicked threats of exposure here and at home, have well nigh driven me mad; and now that I have done what you required of me, let me alone. Do not come near me so long as we are 'up' here. When we go home I will try to behave to you as I have always done. I will spare no effort to do so, but until the vacation I desire to be

let alone." And then, without another parting word, Gilbert left the room, whilst Gerard, surprised and silent, had not power to question him as to the meaning of his words.

"The poor fellow's ill — excited," he thought. "Perhaps annoyed at the wretched discovery I have made, and afraid that Mariott should guess the truth. That he shall never know from me." Gerard went to bed, and laid an hour or more awake devising the construction of the note to be sent to Mariott in the morning.

On the next day, Julius Mariott, of —— College, Cambridge, when seated at breakfast, was greatly surprised by the following note: —

"Dear Mariott, — You are such a good fellow, that I am sure you will feel no offence at what I write, and will heartily coincide in the course which my brother and myself have considered it our duty to adopt with reference to Gilbert's winnings at various times of you and others.

"My father is a man of very violent temper and prejudices, and did he know that either of us had disobeyed any particular injunction of his, I am afraid — nay, I am sure — that the consequences would be most serious to our future welfare. One of the promises which he exacted from us both on coming up here was, that we should never play at cards for money. I am ashamed to say that we have forgotten that promise. A strong sense of the impropriety of this conduct, and of the danger attending it, has made us resolved to throw ourselves upon your generosity,

and ask you to enable us, as far as it can be done, to undo the past by not hesitating to receive the enclosure.

"Mariott, you will not refuse us — you must not. We know how repugnant such acceptance of lost money must be to you; but like a noble, good fellow, waive your right to be angry and offended, and place us in a position to tell our father, should he question us, that we have not altogether disobeyed his injunction or broken our promise. This is, I grant you, a mean equivocation at the best, but it is the nearest approach to truth and right which we can make. You will not refuse us, will you? — I am faithfully,

"GERARD NORWOLD."

"What the devil am I to do?" thought Mariott, when he had finished reading. "This isn't fair to a man. Nobody ought to ask you to do such a thing under any circumstances." He glanced at the letter again, and did not feel quite so certain of his conclusions. "They have put it in such a way that it seems beastly to refuse them. And yet I really can't accept — I can't. I should cut with myself if I did — if that were possible." Another hurried perusal of the letter left the young gentleman more undecided. "Well, it's not fair, that's all I can say, to ask a man such a thing, and in his first term too. Suppose I send it to some charity. Well, perhaps that gets over the difficulty," and Mr. Mariott walked out into High Street so obfuscated that he nearly came to grief by passing no less than three Dons without capping them.

How a single act of good or evil oftentime changes the colour of all our future lives?

Gilbert Norwold, so late the thoughtless, pleasure-seeking youth, was now a moody miserable creature, made so by one guilty deed, which he must hide for years to come within the secret chamber of his own bosom. No, not from every one. His mother must know the dreadful thing he had done, and he would write to her at once. He began to narrate the disgraceful story; but the words he wrote blinded him, and he tore up the paper. To-morrow the confession should be made. Another terrible night passed over, and the theft he had committed appeared more mean, more criminal, and he could not write down the record of his own degradation. He would wait until he returned home, and then he would tell her of his evil doing. Yes, then he would confess to her his sin, and be forgiven.

Two days only of the term remained, and his resolution had not strengthened; so, when Mariott pressed him to spend a week with him before he returned to Norwold Hall, the unhappy criminal felt it as a reprieve, and thankfully accepted the invitation.

The ailing man who suffers day by day from some torturing malady, will often hesitate to seek the aid of the physician, because he fears to learn the worst or bear the pain of cure, until those dreadful words, "Too late," are his sentence to the grave. Gilbert Norwold was like the ailing man, and his moral sore grew and grew, until it killed his peace.

CHAPTER V.

Sacrilege and Matrimony at Morden.

The vacation had commenced, and Gerard had come home alone to Norwold Hall. He had undergone more than one wigging from Sir John on his presumed extravagance, and borne them patiently, convinced that his College bills would bear scrutiny, and that he should deserve, if he did not obtain, the parental blessing. Lady Norwold, though dying, as she said, to embrace her boy, was, nevertheless, glad at his temporary absence, as Gerard had to sustain the first outburst of his father's ill-humours, and Sir John was soon forgetful of most of his resentments.

Shortly after Gerard's return from Cambridge, Sir John was much occupied with his magisterial duties, as Morden church had been entered and robbed of its valuable communion plate, almost under the nose of the beadle. On all similar occasions, it was Sir John's practice to issue warrants against every person suspected of poaching; and although the accused were generally acquitted, the justice of the peace was gratified in thinking that he had caused annoyance to some of the vagabonds who preferred night-walking after his game with the occasional chance of goal allowance to hard labour for eighteen-pence a-day, and the certainty of the short commons such earnings could procure.

The scandal of this sacrilege made the local authorities more than usually fussy; for, strange to say, in no instance of burglary had the county constabulary been successful in discovering a trace of the perpetrators, or of the lost property. The only man in Morden who seemed to have any particular suggestions to make on the matter was Miller Ray, and he earnestly advised that communication should be established with the London police, as there was no doubt that the thieves came from the metropolis, and would undoubtedly dispose of their evil gains in the same locality. The suggestion was accepted by the whole Bench as a very good one (although Sir John insisted upon having a few poachers bagged for his own satisfaction); and the clerk of the court considered the facility with which Mr. Ray drew up the particulars of the robbery as something remarkable in a miller.

Mr. Ray laughed, and assured the functionary that it must be a natural gift, as he had never cultivated it, and its development was only attributable to the honest indignation he felt, in common with the other inhabitants of Morden, at the loss which the church had sustained, not to mention his detestation of the perpetrators of such an act.

Sir John being thus occupied, Gerard was left to his own resources for amusement, and it was therefore no wonder that he was daily with Jack Spraggatt, who was an especial favourite with every one at the Hall.

The Elms were more than usually attractive at

this time, as great preparations were in progress for the marriage of Letty, Jack's elder sister, and Gerard displayed such taste in assisting Lucy to decorate the barn wherein the wedding breakfast was to take place, that he might have been born the son of an upholsterer, rather than the heir to an ancient baronetcy. A looker-on might have thought that he occupied more time than was really necessary in peering into Lucy's pretty face, asking her questions as to the effect of his arrangements, or requesting assistance in carrying them out, than became such an adept. Lucy's face was very pretty, certainly, and when she smiled, and her bright blue eyes sparkled also, it was not an easy matter to look away from it. Her rich auburn curls were fitting adornments for such features, and almost wooed the fingers to play with the silken tresses. Her voice, too, was a pleasant sound to hear, making the commonest words seem like notes of music.

Her figure would have been injured by any less simple dress than that which she generally wore, and flounces, and braids, and fringes would have been as much out of keeping as they would be upon Canova's masterpiece. Yet she appeared unconscious of her beauty, although, no doubt, she and her looking-glass were no strangers to each other. She was well educated as middle-class girls were taught then, and could sing and play such simple songs and melodies as make the music festivals of home. She had paid long visits to London, and could talk of other things beside farm-stock and poultry, and had not lost her love for the

duties of her country life, as the dairy and store-room could testify. She was the light of Jack Spraggatt's home, and he rejoiced in his heart of hearts that it was Letty who was about to leave them, and not Lucy.

The wedding day was close at hand, and a great day it was to be! Jack Spraggatt was not so lively as he ought to have been, Gerard said, but Lucy thought she could divine the reason. The bridegroom elect was a Frenchman, whom Letty had met in London. He was a young man of a good Protestant family, but the Spraggatts had their national prejudices, and would rather have had their new connection one of the family of John Bull. The fates had willed it otherwise, for Letty, who was a pretty, weak-minded girl, and consequently very obstinate, had, despite many domestic engagements with the family, compelled them at last to lay down their arms and surrender at her discretion. It was Jack's dislike to the Frenchman (or something else, perhaps), that made him very moody at times, and a little cross when new expenses were proposed, or the list of invitations was extended.

It is surprising what interest all women take in weddings. Marriage is certainly a great event in a young girl's life, and should be productive of happy anticipations, even when her nurture has been gentle and her home a loving one. Still, there is change before her, a future which may differ widely from the past, a newer love to be trusted than the one that has watched over her from the hour of her birth, and been

prodigal of all which has constituted the happiness of her life. Alas! no past, however free from cares, can ensure a future equally happy, and the old must die and leave the young to trust in one another.

It is wonderful, we repeat, the interest women take in weddings, even in those where they themselves are not the principals. Mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, friends and servants, when a wedding is in prospect, display a consequence and an excitement entirely unusual with them. The family conversation (and we doubt not that of the collateral relations we have enumerated) lapses occasionally into other subjects, but the grand staple is of the bride and bridemaids, wreaths, dresses, presents, and wedding-cake. Money, labour, time, are all accounted subservient to the one grand object, as though a great sacrificial ceremony was about to take place, and every one was bound to be prepared with an offering.

The Elms was no exception to other households, and the number of volunteer needlewomen was immense. Willing pens were busy day and evening inditing invitations to friends distant and near, until poor Jack thought that the Big Barn would be fuller than it was before Miller Ray emptied it. He ventured once or twice to hint at a limitation of numbers, but such excellent and unanswerable reasons were given why the list should be increased rather than curtailed, that he always retired discomfited.

Gerard invariably sided with the ladies, unless, indeed, Lucy voted with Jack, and then he thought

no more of giving a plumper in opposition to the opinion he had previously expressed than would a free and independent voter who had listened to the eloquence of the late Mr. David Locke during a contested election.

The wedding-day arrived at last, and the Big Barn looked like a sylvan bower, so well had Gerard and Lucy devised, and willing labourers had worked. The tables were covered with home-made delicacies, whilst the plate-baskets of relatives and dear friends had been laid under contribution, and their contents glittered as brightly as the glasses. Lucy ran to take a peep just before going to church, although arrayed in her bride-maid's dress of simple white, dotted over with lilies gathered from her own garden, and was surprised to find Gerard there, giving the rustic servants the benefit of his more refined experience. With gentlemanly delicacy he had not called at the house, as Jack had not presumed to ask him to the church, although he had invited him to the breakfast, and therefore Gerard came to Lucy and apologised for the liberty he was taking, in directing the arrangements of the wedding-feast.

Oh, that blushing cheek; that radiant smile which thanked him as much as the sweet voice for such kindly consideration, and Gerard saw and heard them long after Lucy had gone to the distant church, long after, when he had seen no other face he knew for many weary months, and when he sighed to think he should never meet Lucy more.

None must believe them to be lovers.

Had Gerard Norwold suspected that he had in his heart a spark of love for Lucy, he would have crushed it out by his will remorselessly. He was the heir to an old ancestry, and would have died any death rather than have disgraced it by a marriage with one beneath him in station. He knew her only as dear old Jack Spraggatt's pretty, graceful, happy, honest-hearted sister, and so he esteemed her. Had Lucy believed that the pleasure she derived from her association with Gerard Norwold was other than the gratification of a respectful friendship, she would have despised herself, for she never forgot the difference of station which existed between them. No! none must believe them to be lovers.

The bridal feast was a merry one, and

"Laughter holding both his sides,"

seemed to have taken the chair for the occasion.

The oratory was rather discursive, and the metaphors somewhat mixed, but the hearts of the speakers were in their words; and when that is the case, any one, to our thinking, is a Demosthenes.

Thresher's flails had made noisy clattering on the floor of the Big Barn times and often, and the drowsy bats, nestling in the roof, had slept on in peace, but the hearty response to the health of the bride and bridegroom, roused them from their slumber, and scared them into the daylight.

Jack Spraggatt's face beamed with the sunshine in

his heart, which did not leave it when his French brother-in-law, M. Fichard, broke down in his English, and finished his "return thanks" in his own language, as though he had been the personification of a French and English vocabulary.

The bridal feast had lasted long enough — to judge by the hubbub which succeeded, and the general desire on the part of the gentlemen to shake hands with each other; whilst their happy, healthy faces, showed in the richer brown which stained them, that the good wine had reached their hearts as well as their heads; therefore, a final glass was drank, and a parting cheer was given so heartily that it overpowered the church bells which had been ding-donging for the last quarter of an hour as a summons to the lingering bride and bridegroom.

The lawn at the Elms might have challenged the county for a display of beauty and rustic elegance. Matrimony is considered by the highest authorities to be epidemical; and such whisperings and smilings, such daring attempts at pressing of fingers, and, in one or two instances, of waist encirclings, that any one might have surmised that more than a dozen couples, strolling about Jack's garden, had taken the infection that joyous morning.

When the time arrived for the departure of the happy pair, the poor pale face of the bride was made rosy with kisses, as she passed up the garden walk to the gate, and some agitated young gentleman became sufficiently confused and excited to salute the bride-

maids, whose screaming was delightful to hear. Be merry, happy youth! Lose no innocent pleasure, nor indulge in a sinful one! Gather every flower that your hand can reach. Listen to every pleasant song that charms your ear. Dance! Dance! whilst your heart is light, and be thankful for your beauty, before wrinkles steal into your face, or a silver thread shines in your soft hair! God gave you youth for enjoyment, that the remembrance of its delights may come back to you in age, and solace you with its happy memories — but happy only when pure and innocent.

The bride and bridegroom departed with all the time-honoured ceremonies, the old slipper reposing in the bosom of Mr. Fichard's full-frilled shirt. There were willing hands enough to clear the tables, and prepare the barn for dancing, and nimble feet to keep the town band constantly employed in playing country dances, reels and jigs, for as yet the solemn quadrille had not been introduced generally to the Morden Terpsichoreans. Those were the dancing days of Old England, putting to shame our shambling, hopping, sliddering times, and hands across, down the middle, up again, and pousset had been performed twenty times at least before Sir Roger de Coverley wound up the ball by exhausting the most persistent dancer after a bout of three-quarters of an hour, — and so a happy morning ended with a happy night. At least all said as much the next day, excepting Gerard, who having missed Jack from the ball-room for some time, went in search of him.

Jack was not in the house, and one of the servants said she had seen him walking in the garden. Gerard sought his friend in the direction indicated, and found him at last standing in the shadow of a yew hedge, his face covered by his hands and his broad bosom heaving painfully.

"My dear old fellow!" said Gerard. "What is the matter with you?"

Jack recovered himself instantly, and answered: "Nothing, Gerard; nothing, really. The heat of the barn — the excitement of the day rather overpowered me."

"Forgive me, Jack," said Gerard, "but you are not telling me the truth. Surely you do not regret this marriage? I know it was not a matter you would have desired, but —"

"I am glad, very glad, that Letty has found so good a husband. Do not ask me to tell you — at least, not now — what has disturbed and unmanned me. It is something to be thankful for to know that you, my kind warmhearted friend, can never be unhappy from the same cause, unless you create it by your own free will, and that I believe to be impossible. No more now. Let us go to my friends, and — No, I will not ask you to be silent as to what you have seen, for you are a gentleman."

Jack returned with Gerard to the dancers in the barn, and for the next hour was the merriest of them all. It was not very long after that he and Gerard made strange revelations to each other.

As there was a bright moon that night — bright as the coming honeymoon, which was to shine on a whole month of wedded happiness — Gerard had arranged to walk home, having engaged a bed at the inn in the market place, as Sir John objected, when he was not the cause, to the servants at the Hall sitting up. He had entered the High Street, and was walking leisurely on, when a man passed him, bidding him "good night." Gerard returned the salutation, and at the sound of his voice the man turned, and accosted him by name.

"Yes, I am Mr. Gerard Norwold," he replied.

"You are a friend, I believe, of Mr. John Spraggatt, sir," said the man.

"I am. What then?"

"You have just left his house, I conclude?"

"Yes. What then?"

"Do you know, sir, whether any of his men servants sleep in the house to-night?" asked the stranger.

"That is a question I decline to answer," replied Gerard. "As you are unknown to me, I beg you to leave me."

"You would not, if you knew the motive I have in making the inquiry," said the man.

"Perhaps so; but as I do not, I will thank you to keep the way you were going, and allow me to follow mine alone."

"Very well, sir," said the man. "It is of no great consequence, perhaps. Good night, sir," and to Gerard's

surprise, he saw his unknown questioner take the way to the river. In a few moments he heard the plash of oars, and soon after a boat struck against the opposite bank.

"Quite an adventure," he thought to himself. "If he has any intention of paying Jack an unseasonable visit, I should not advise him to select to-night for doing so." Thus musing, Gerard reached his inn without further interruption.

Jack went to bed soon after midnight, having secured safely in the great oak chest the borrowed plate, which had added so much to the splendour of the breakfast; but sleep came not. No, the skeleton in the cupboard was waiting in his bedchamber to recall to him the past, and to remind him of the present and the future. As he lay thus occupied he heard the same creaking noise as had attracted his attention when the window hasp had been filed, and the old chest ransacked. He rose at once, and opening his window noiselessly, looked out, and saw two men at work beneath him. Before he could think upon his course of action, a low whistle from the road startled the burglars, and with the swiftness of guilty men they fled up the garden, and joined the confederate who had given the signal. That man's figure appeared to be familiar to him. What was that man?

Jack crept softly down-stairs, and was rejoiced to find the great oak box safe as he had left it. He laid himself upon it and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

Lucy makes a Confidant of Gerard, and he brings Jack to Confession.

THREE days after the wedding and its glories had passed away, Gerard came to the Elms for a day's fishing with his friend Jack. He found Lucy alone in the breakfast parlour, as Mrs. Spraggatt was indisposed, and Jack was busy arranging the tackle in his own room.

Gerard was completely at home at the Elms, therefore he had entered without ceremony, and was surprised to find Lucy so occupied with her thoughts, that she was not conscious of his presence for some moments. Her thoughts were sad ones, as Gerard read them, and it was not until he had wished her good morning, that her habitual smile returned, and bade him welcome. As it was the first time that Gerard had ever seen a shade of sadness upon those sunny features, he had during the few moments it had remained there thought of Jack in the yew walk, and connected the two meetings with each other.

The shadow had gone, however, like the one passing cloud on a summer sky, and all was sunshine again in that sweet face, and placing her hand in Gerard's with the freedom of her honest friendship, she wished her guest good morning in such a cheery

voice, that he almost mistrusted the evidence of his eyes.

Jack answered to her summons with a cheery voice also, and instantly joined his friend at the breakfast table. A capital breakfast it was, and the two young men with a long day's sport before them did complete justice to it. Jack managed to monopolise the talk, and seemed so elated at his prospective holiday, that any one might have supposed he had never had a day's fishing since his school days.

"We will try Drayton water first, Gerard," he said; "there used to be the best trout in the county from the mill up to the stone bridge, unless the rascally poachers have taken them. If that fails us, we will drive over to Basston, and have a try for a jack or two. I have sent on to the Drayton Arms, and ordered some live bait to be ready. And Lucy has packed up a hamper for dinner, so that we may make a long day of it, as the evening often makes amends for the bad sport of the morning. Our luncheons we can take in our pockets. Dinner we will have at the Drayton Arms, and old Mrs. Morgan will think herself well paid by half-a-crown, and what the men will have to drink. You've brought a couple of rods, I see. You need not have burthened yourself with a landing net, as I have a couple. Another cup of tea, Lucy, and tell Joe, when he comes home to dinner, to take the black horse to be shod. He ought to have seen that his fore shoes are worn as thin as a sixpence. I've not had a day's fishing, Mr. Gerard, since we

went out together last autumn. Don't hurry your breakfast, I have a short note to write, and the chaise-cart will be at the door by the time I have done — say half an hour from this; and Lucy you will see to the rest, dear, I know; I shall not be more than half-an-hour — no, not more than twenty minutes," and Jack left the room.

There was nothing in this common-place talk to call up again the sad look in Lucy's face, yet it was there, and Gerard saw it with some anxiety.

"Jack seems in high spirits this morning, Miss Spraggatt," said Gerard; "but they are natural to him, I believe?"

"Yes, Mr. Gerard;" replied Lucy, "that is they used to be, and indeed when either my mother or myself are present he is always cheerful. But ——"

The hesitating manner with which she said this, and then her sudden pause, assured Gerard that Jack was not such a clever actor as to deceive the sister who loved him.

"You were about to add something more," said Gerard.

The tears came into Lucy's eyes, and she rose and closed the door leading into Jack's room, having first satisfied herself that her brother was not there. She returned and took her seat again quietly at the table, and looking at Gerard as she had never looked at him before, for her eyes were full of sorrow, she said, almost in a whisper —

"Mr. Gerard, I know you are my brother's friend

— one that he values more than any other in the world — and I have longed for some days past to speak to you concerning him. For many weeks before my sister's marriage, I observed a great change in him. Whenever our conversation turned on that subject — and it did so necessarily very often — I have seen his expression alter, as though our, perhaps, silly talk of dresses and arrangements pained him. Sometimes he would leave the room; but if he remained, he seemed by an effort to recover his usual cheerfulness, although his banter would now and then sound very like remonstrance."

"I fancy," said Gerard, as Lucy again paused, "that Jack was not over pleased with your sister's selection. That was, perhaps, the cause of what you observed."

"I thought so, too," continued Lucy, "until the wedding day had passed, but the hearty manner in which he received Mons. Fichard convinced me he had overcome his objections, for Jack is no hypocrite, unless he is now practising an hypocrisy, which God forbid."

For a moment her tears choked her utterance, and then would have way.

"May I venture to ask," said Gerard, "what you now think? — that is, if you believe that I can be of any service."

"Yes, Mr. Gerard, and it is because I think you may be of service to my dear brother, that I have been so bold, as to speak to you now. I am sure he

has some secret sorrow — some grief which he will not let me share. It is nothing shameful, of that I am certain, but he fears to give me, perhaps our dear mother, pain by the revelation. What it is I do not guess even, but I cannot let him suffer alone and be silent, when so true a friend as you are to him is at hand."

"You make me proud to think I am so considered by you, Lucy. Tell me, do you think he is in love?" and Gerard smiled.

Lucy strove to smile also as she replied, "No. Jack is too hard to please to be in love, I fancy. There was a most dear and beautiful friend of mine that we once thought he admired, and oh! how happy I should have been had he done so! I am sure he would not have been an unsuccessful wooer; but shortly after my father's death, Jack was so occupied with business matters that he avoided all opportunities of meeting her, and of late their intercourse has ceased altogether. No — Jack is not in love."

"What, then do you desire? That I should endeavour to ask his confidence?"

"Yes! Yes! Mr. Gerard, do not let him suffer alone. Tell him, if you will, that I entreat him to confide in you, or if he dare, in me — his sister. If his grief, whatever it may be, can be shared by me, implore him not to keep it from me, for there is nothing my love could not endure or strive to do for the dearest, kindest brother that ever a sister had."

Gerard did not speak until Lucy's tears had ceased, and she again looked at him for a reply.

"I will make the attempt, Miss Spraggatt, and I think I may not be unsuccessful" — the meeting in the yew walk coming back to him. "If I succeed and find that I can be of help to him, there is nothing I will not do. My power to be of service is very limited."

"Oh, no!" said Lucy, the shadows all gone once more — "oh, no! for you can be his friend, his confidant; perhaps his adviser. And you will?"

Gerard took the hand she offered now, and pressing it between his own, vowed in his heart to be a faithful knight and do the lady's bidding.

Before the growling old clock in the passage had struck the half-hour, the chaise-cart was at the door, and rods, creels, and hampers safely stowed away, with Jack ready to mount beside his friend, and only waiting to give Lucy a parting kiss, as ever was his wont. When her lovely face was turned upwards to receive her brother's salutation, Jack started and paused for a second; but Lucy threw her arms around his neck, and kissing him a score of times ran into the house, and waved them good-bye from the window.

Jack gave a short cough as they drove away, as though something had displeased or surprised him. He was almost sure that Lucy had been crying. Why? Gerard could not have been saying anything to annoy her, or — No, he was too true a gentleman to cause her pain in any way, and to excite false hopes would

be to do a cruel thing. So Jack soon recovered his good spirits, and on they went to Drayton Waters, where a man was waiting to take the chaise-cart and horse to the Drayton Arms.

The anglers soon went to work, and a gentle breeze, ruffling the surface of the water, gave promise of sport. We are unskilful in the practice of the gentle craft, and have preferred to take our trout and goodly perch in the pleasant pages of honest Isaak Walton (as it is the phrase to name that torturer of worms and live bait), and are free to own that in our own piscatorial essays, we have found our pleasure in the contemplation of the bright stream and clustered water plants, and flickering insects that haunt the drooping boughs, or when stretched at length beneath the umbrageous shadow of some stately tree, our rod and line neglected in the stream — we have watched the pale blue smoke our lips had breathed, curl upwards to the clouds, and called our dreaming, peace.

Nevertheless, we can imagine the ecstatic pleasure others have professed to have known at the success of their skill and cunning in hooking a two-pound trout, or a formidable jack, the tyrant of fresh waters, or, braver still, the noble salmon. How the prey was fairly hooked, and played, and landed, makes better after-dinner talk than much of the prosing of sages, philosophers, and politicians.

As Gerard Norwold and Jack Spraggatt were enthusiasts at the sport, both deeply learned in the entymology of the craft, and clever manipulators of

silk and feathers to lure the wiliest fish; and knowing exceedingly in all baits whether ground, live, or dead; it was no wonder, therefore, that Gerard on turning a bend of the stream, saw with great pain his friend leaning on his rod, and busied with other thoughts than how to fill his creel.

So occupied was Jack Spraggatt that he did not hear Gerard's approach until his friend's hand was upon his shoulder. The poor dreamer tried to wake without a struggle, but the sorrow at his heart made it impossible to conceal his agitation.

"My dear old friend," said Gerard, "again in the yew walk, for this good stream and this favouring breeze are nothing to you this day. Come, let us sit down and have a chat, Jack; for I am commissioned to drag this sorrow — whatever it may be — out into the light."

"By whom?" asked Jack, with a frown.

"One whom you love the most in the world, except your mother. Your sister Lucy! I have given her my promise to speak to you — and no better time than now. Let us sit down."

Jack obeyed, and, clasping his knees with his hands, looked gloomily towards the stream that flowed past so merrily.

Gerard then recalled word by word as nearly as he could remember, the conversation with Lucy, and as he did so, the face of his auditor now flushing red, now overspread with a deadly pallor, revealed how closely the recital touched him. When Gerard had

repeated all that had passed between Lucy and himself, he added:

"I have now told you all, and you will believe, my dear Jack, that I would not have attempted to obtain the confidence I ask, if your sister had not urged me to do so."

"I know it," answered Jack. "I know it. I saw that she had been crying, and was puzzled to guess the reason. Your question is soon answered. One little word tells all the story."

"Love?" said Gerard.

"No!" exclaimed the other — "Debt!"

"Debt! is that all!" said Gerard, smiling. But the expression and eartnestness of his friend almost frightened him.

"Is that all, Gerard Norwold? I told you on my sister's wedding night that you could not understand the nature of my sorrow. That all! There is not a good gift that God has given me — loving relatives, earnest friends, health, cheerfulness, a pleasant home, and welcome labour which is not changed into bitterness by that accursed debt. It comes to me in the dead of night and breaks my sleep. It stands by my bed-side when I lie down or rise up. It walks with me wherever I go, and sits at my table, only scared away by the effort of a strong will and a sense of duty to those I love."

"My dear Jack," said Gerard, when his friend ceased speaking, "try and calm yourself. Let us look this devil in the face, and see how we can lay him.

The mouse once saved the lion, and I may nibble a hole in the net which enmeshes you. How stand matters?"

"You must have patience, and hear my story. Until two days before my father's death, I believed, whenever I thought of the matter — that we were wealthy — wealthy for our station, I mean. We all thought the same — my mother and sisters. My father sent for me two days before his death, and when we were alone, said to me: 'My poor boy, I leave you a sad inheritance, I fear; but you must not flinch from doing your duty to those who will soon have no friend but you to provide for them. I will not dwell upon particulars — enough that he told me during the three preceding years he had met with great losses, and that every endeavour to retrieve them had only made bad matters worse, until he should leave me many difficulties to overcome as best I could, and which he believed, had his life been spared, he could have mastered. He died, dear, kind, ever loving father, and I took up the load he had laid down only beside his grave. Young and hopeful, I went to work with a will, but I found matters much worse than I had believed them to be. I, too, tried by bold ventures to redeem our fortunes, but all that I touched turned out a loss. Wool, hops, corn, all went against me, and now I see no help for it but to sell off whatever we have, and pay our debts."

"This is bad news, indeed, my old boy," said Gerard. "You have friends —"

"Yes, and they have stood by me to the uttermost, and must not be losers by me. To go on is to be completely ruined ourselves, and to ruin others."

"Suppose the worst you have described inevitable, you are still young enough, and there is a new world opening, we hear, to all who are not afraid of work," said Gerard.

"Do you think that it is for my own future — nay, my own present, that I care? No, Gerard, but when I see my mother's grey hairs, and remember how many years of peace and honour she has passed beneath our roof — when I see my dear, dear sister, whose life has hitherto been clouded by only one sorrow — my father's death, and know that there will be no longer a home for her — that she must fight the battle of life by my side, and share my fortunes, be they what they may, my heart grows sick, and I dare not — truly dare not, disturb their present peace, although I know their dreams must soon be roughly broken."

For some time the two friends sat silent, Jack being exhausted by the pain his confession had occasioned him, and Gerard, bewildered by the difficulties which presented themselves, necessarily, to one unused to business complications.

"I have been thinking," said Gerard, after awhile, "what you ought to do with regard to your sister. You do her a wrong in not confiding your position to her. She will not be so unhappy in knowing all you have told me as she is now, doubting the cause of

your distress. She ought, also, to be prepared for this change, if it be unavoidable; or, who knows? her cleverness may devise some mode of extrication for you."

Jack shook his head at this last improbable contingency, and did not reply at once; but springing to his feet, he took his rod and began whipping the stream in, as Gerard thought, a most inartistic manner. His success was commensurate with his unskilfulness, and he returned in a quarter of an hour with his creel no better stocked than when he started. He held out his hand to Gerard, and said, "My dear friend, I have decided what to do; I will take counsel with Lucy — and you, if you will be of the party. I will look matters boldly in the face, and if it must come to an end in England, why be it so. I have a friend there who is doing well. He has been some three years in the colony, and sends home very cheering accounts of his success; and what he has done, I may do. So no more at present, but as you have been cheated of your lunch, let us go at once to the Drayton Arms and have dinner."

They soon reached Mrs. Morgan's little roadside inn, and put the worthy hostess into a fluster by arriving an hour before the time appointed; the more so, as it was hay-making time, and the labourers at the adjoining farm were waiting for their "'lowance o' beer." The two friends, therefore, expressed their willingness to wait Mrs. Morgan's leisure, and strolled into the garden.

A rough country lane ran at the bottom of this garden, and as Jack Spraggatt stood looking over the hedge two men in a higgler's cart drove up. The driver was a powerful flashy-looking fellow, his broad-brimmed hat cocked knowingly on one side, and his sharp fresh-coloured face peering out of a series of bandana handkerchiefs tied loosely round his neck. He wore a fustian shooting coat with large metal buttons, relieved by a faded livery waistcoat. Altogether, he was not a very presentable person. His companion was less objectionable in appearance, at least as much as could be seen of him, as he was nearly buried in a hat much too large for his head, whilst his neck and chin were lost in the folds of a worsted comforter, despite the heat of the weather. A velveteen jacket, as much too small for him as his hat was too large, was kept together by a piece of string, and he held between his knees a narrow square box carefully covered with green baize, and which he embraced with both arms, as though he owned a treasure that he was prepared to defend with his life.

"Hallo, mister," said the driver, addressing Mr. John Spraggatt; "is this the way to the Drayton Arms?"

"Yes; the next turning brings you into the main road," replied Jack.

"Much obliged," said the man. "My friend here in the hat undertook to pilot me; but, as he always travels a-foot, he brought me down this infernal rutty road, which has been nigh breaking my springs and

sending my fowls into fits. — Much obliged," and then he drove on.

"Who was that, Jack?" asked Gerard.

"I don't know. A queer-looking fellow, whoever he may be, and one I shouldn't like to meet on a dark night, without a thick stick for my companion."

"I know his voice," said Gerard. "I seem to have heard it very lately, and under unfavourable circumstances. Ah! I remember now; it was on the night of the wedding. He spoke to me in High Street." Gerard then narrated, for the first time, the conversation he had had with the strange man who was so inquisitive about Jack's household.

"That was a strange meeting," said Jack, "and connects itself with an unpleasant circumstance which occurred on that very night. I have never spoken of the matter at home, as my mother is a very nervous woman, and I did not wish to alarm her." Jack then acquainted Gerard with the attempt which had been made to force the window, and also the result of the first visit of the burglars.

"And who was the man you thought you recognised?" asked Gerard.

"No, that would not be fair to the man I suspect," replied Jack. "It is more than probable that I was mistaken. We will have another look at my friend the higgler when we have had dinner."

Mrs. Morgan soon announced that Lucy's good things were on the table, and the two friends, both re-

lieved in mind by the morning's revelations, enjoyed their meal as though there was not a care in store for either of them. Who that has lived out half his life would seek to raise the veil which shrouds the future; for though the present has its sorrows and its trials, there is hope to sweeten the bitterness of the cup.

The gentle breeze which had rippled the water in the morning had gathered strength as the day advanced, and brought up a thunder-storm, which soon drove the haymakers from the field, and some of them sought shelter in the Drayton Arms. The rain continued after the thunder had ceased, and then from the tap-room came sounds of a jingling melody, which defied the knowledge of the two friends to determine by what instrument they were produced. Their curiosity became so excited that they resolved to seek out the minstrel in the tap-room, and found, on proceeding there, that it was the higgler's companion, and that the mysterious case which he had carried between his legs was a box strung with wires upon which he performed, by beating upon them with two sticks, and producing the jangle which they had heard. The minstrel was uncovered, and showed to his delighted auditors a round smiling face, in which were inserted a pair of bright piggy eyes, peeping about from beneath two shaggy brows, attached apparently to his straight coarse hair, which had been cropped by some artist who was insensible to the advantages of what a scientific operator would call "pointing."

On the settle which occupied the now fireless ingle,

sat the higgler, smoking his pipe and carefully scrutinising the assembled rustics. He only gave a momentary glance at Gerard and Spraggatt when they entered the room, as though he considered he had made a sufficient acknowledgment for the civility of the morning.

"And what do you call that instrument?" said Jack, when the player had ended his tune.

"Dulcimer!" answered the minstrel; "thirty years old; belonged to my feather. He played it, too. Like a song, gentlemen? I sings as well."

The proposal was accepted without a dissentient voice, and the musician proceeded to administer a course of verses which left the two friends in a state of mental prostration from their endeavour to extract the meaning of the muddle of sounds he uttered. As Gerard, with Jack's assistance, contrived at a later period of the afternoon, when they had secured the services of the minstrel to themselves, to take down his utterances, we venture to transcribe them, regretting that we cannot convey the tune, and the manner of the minstrel as he gravely delivered himself of the following copy of verses: —

1.

"I'll spread these green bushes although I am young,
So well do I like my love, so sweetly she sung —
Was there ever a mortal in so happy a state,
As I'd be with Floro, fair Floro so swate?

2.

"I'll go to my Floro, and to her I'll say,
'We both will be married, it wants but one day.'
'One day!' says the fair one, 'that day is to come;
To be married so early, my age is too young.

3.

"'I'll first go to sarvice, and when I return,
We both will be married in the next town.'
'Will first go to sarvice? and leave me to cry!'
'O yes, love! fine shepherd! I've toud you for why.'

4.

"As it happen'd, to sarvice, to sarvice she went,
To wait on a lady it was her intent;
To wait on a lady, a lady so gay,
Who clothed fair Floro in constant array!

5.

"A twelvemonth, or better, a letter he sent,
He wrote a few lines to know her intent;
She wrote 'that she lived so contented a life,
That she never, no, never! 'ud be a poor shepherd's wife.'

6.

"These words by experience appeared like a dart,
'I'll pluck up my speerit, and cheer up my heart!
In hoping she never might write so no more,
Her answer consumed me as ofttimes before.

7.

"'My yows and my lambs too I'll bid them adieu!
My ship-crook and black-dog, I'll give them to you!
My bagpipe and budget, I leave you behind,
Since Floro, fair Floro, has changèd her mind!'"

The rain having ceased at last, the higgler and his bard prepared to take their departure, and were on the point of doing so, when two of the county constabulary drove up, and somewhat peremptorily ordered the higgler's cart to be taken back into the yard.

"What's up now, gentlemen," said the higgler; "you seem to know my business better than I do myself. I don't want to stay here now the rain is over."

The county constables were not accustomed to be

addressed so familiary, especially when on duty, and by a person of the higgler's questionable character.

"Don't you make a noise," said one of them. "Just step this way, whilst we have a word of a sort with you."

"No objection in the world," said the higgler, "so that neither on you is a member of parliament, and wants to talk by the yard. After you's manners — Oh! if you wish it certainly," and the burly fellow swaggered into the little parlour where Jack and Gerard were seated.

"Ask your pardon, gentlemen," said the higgler, not allowing either of the officials to speak. "Ask your pardon for intruding, but I do so at the request of these intelligent gentlemen, who will now, perhaps, explain what is their little game in detaining me."

The young friends were both known to the county constables, who briefly apologised, and then explained the purport of their visit.

It seemed, according to their statement, that for some time past many burglaries had been committed in the county, and evidently by London thieves. It had been ascertained that wherever a robbery had been effected the higgler and his companion had been seen immediately afterwards, as some said, and often before, as asserted by others. The magistrates had therefore, issued a warrant for the two men, and they had been followed to the Drayton Arms, and intercepted as we have narrated.

"Very well, gentlemen," said the higgler, "you

have got hold of some valuable information, and I wouldn't mind laying glasses round that some day you'll see a hole through a mill-stone. Now, just hear what I've got to say. You and your masters do this at their peril; I am an honest man, following an honest calling, and so is my musical friend in the hat. I am engaged in finding a particular breed of five-toed hens for a noble lord in London, and that takes me about to many places in and out of your county. However, duty is duty, and I know you must do as you're ordered. I make no resistance, nor does little Dulcimer. Only I wish to say this, that I'll bet you more glasses round that I'll meet you here, or at any house in Morden to-morrow evening, provided I have my hearing in the morning."

"Why, you impudent fellow," said Gerard, unable longer to keep silence. "Do you fancy I do not recognise you as the man who spoke to me, some four nights ago in High Street."

"Mr. Gerard Norwolk has good ears," replied the man, making a bow, "and I never contradict a gentleman. Now, my men," addressing the constables, "we are with you — I've only one more thing to say; be careful, very careful of little Cobby's dulcimer, for at the price he sets upon it he'll ruin you in damages, if you injure a wire."

The officers and their captives soon drove off, Jack and Gerard watching them from the inn window, little dreaming then, how much the after life of both of them was to be influenced by the burly higgler.

CHAPTER VII.

The Higgler appears in a New Character, and discovers some Unusual Grist at the Mill.

In the morning Jack Spraggatt acquainted his sister Lucy with all his troubles, and Gerard, who had arranged to assist at the family council, was delighted when he arrived to find them sitting in the summer-house, and talking cheerfully of the future. "We both owe you a thousand thanks, Mr. Gerard," said Lucy, "for compelling this naughty boy to admit me into partnership in his tribulations. They are sad ones, truly; but if I understand them rightly, as I think I do, I see no cause for despair."

"No, no!" cried Jack. "Nor do I now."

"Jack has one sad fault, Mr. Gerard; he is deficient in self-reliance. He will not look at the future as a field wherein he may win victories, but strews it over with the dead hopes of the past, and is ready to surrender to the first difficulty that approaches. Is it not so?"

"Yes. I own it," answered Jack. "I do fear the future when I see how many interests beside my own are in peril from failure upon my part. Lucy, dear, you should have been the man and I the woman of this family."

"If I had been, I would not have allowed my poor

little sister to have imagined all kinds of dreadful things, when half an hour's quiet chat could have made her as happy as I am now, you naughty boy." And she gave Jack's broad cheek such a loving kiss that Gerard almost wished that he had been born a twin-brother of his yeoman friend.

"We have been reading over this terrible list of debts," said Lucy, referring to a sheet of foolscap paper which she held in her hand, and I see nothing to fear so very much. Our creditors are chiefly friends who have helped Jack through many difficulties, and I am sure would not withdraw from him now. We must all be more careful of our means, and learn to speak that difficult word — No! — and so I doubt not in a few brief years to be emancipated from the slavery of debt."

"Spoken like a brave, true-hearted sister, Miss Lucy," said Gerard, "and Jack will be unworthy of you, if he ever shows the white feather again."

"White feather!" replied Jack. "I hardly think I have been a coward. I never feared for myself; it was for those I loved — for those who had trusted me. My dear Gerard, may you never have like cause for such endurance. You have no reason to fear it, as riches, honour, station, are all before you! May they bring you the peace they should do when rightly used."

"Ah! Jack, never was there a wiser proverb than 'It is not all gold that glitters.' There are sad hearts often enough at Norwold Hall," replied Gerard. "That

is the reason you are plagued so frequently with my company. My father's temper gets more violent, and now that he has a personal call from the gout, there is little cause for any one to envy my lady mother-in-law. Our College bills arrived to-day, and such a storm was raging in the breakfast-room that I doubled back, and came on here to invoke your hospitality." Lucy rose instantly, saying, "I am so glad you have named it" — and then, pausing, she placed her arm around her brother's neck, and looked into his face so lovingly, that Gerard thought there was nothing in Norwold Hall either of art or luxury, that he would not have exchanged willingly for such deep sympathy as that look conveyed.

"My dear old Jack," she said, "we two may soon be all that is left of our little household. Our father awaits us in the happy land, and our dear mother is hastening fast to join him. Our sister Letty has a home apart from us, and we shall regard her by-and-by as one whom we have loved, but may see no more. We then shall be alone. From this hour, then, promise me, in the presence of your dearest friend, that no sorrow — no anxiety shall come to you without giving me my sister's share. As I have partaken in the fruits of your labour and your care, I claim a right to have my portion of the ill. I cannot work with my hands, but I can with my heart, and a few words of honest love — perhaps of woman's wisdom, will make your burthens lighter. You promise to do what I now ask of you?"

Jack clasped her in his arms, and the big, stalwart man — we must chronicle truths as they arise — blubbered like "a great lubberly boy."

A brighter face, however, never shone through tears in the course of a few moments than Jack's; and the whole party, as happy as though all debts had been really paid, and had not to be worked for, hardly worked for, both with brain and hand, passed through the porch into Jack's parlour.

There was nothing uncommon in the components of Gerard's luncheon, yet never were viands so grateful to the taste, or nut-brown ale such incomparable tipple! It was the last pleasant meal Gerard was destined to have beneath that roof!

The last day's fishing which had passed so strangely was to be compensated for by another holiday in the ensuing week, and Lucy was to be caterer again. Why should not Lucy and her favourite gossips be of the party also? There were many pretty nooks by Drayton Waters, where they could dine and make merry, much better than in Mrs. Morgan's tobacco-smelling parlour. Why not ask some other pleasant friends? and Jack should take down his fiddle from the peg, where it had hung for twenty months or more, and recover his fingering, and be prepared to make music to which the rocks and trees might dance if they pleased, like their classical ancestors. What a merry day was in store for them!

Time, the old scene-shifter, obeys no human prompter's whistle. The fates have written out his

scene-plot, and as the changes are set down upon that scroll, so will they come and go; and we, the actors, strut and fret our little lives away. The curtain will soon rise upon our story, and show a change indeed!

The saucy higgler had been as good as his word. When taken before the magistrates — Sir John Norwold, despite his gout and ill-temper, being in the chair — the higgler bowed respectfully to the Bench, and appeared to be a very different man to the noisy blusterer of the preceding evening. The county constables gave their evidence with the usual circumlocution, and promised to bring forward witnesses to substantiate their statements, if the prisoners were remanded for a few days.

Gout and ill-temper concentrated in the person of a justice of the peace, are not usually favourable to the interests of a prisoner, especially when appearances are against him, and the higgler had taken some pains to place himself at a disadvantage, so far as his wardrobe was concerned; and Cobby, the bard, though looking simplicity or stupidity itself, was not sufficient to counterbalance the unfavourable impression created by his friend, innocently employed, as he said, in searching for five-toed hens.

"Well, man," said Sir John, "what have you to say for yourself? This cock-and-bull story of yours is not credited by the Bench. If you've nothing better to say for yourself, and that other fellow who stands blinking like an owl, we shall commit you on remand as the constables require."

"Will your worship be kind enough to look at this letter," said the higgler, coolly.

"No written characters here, sir," replied Sir John. "We know how such things are concocted, eh, gentlemen?

"I hope you will not decline looking at that paper, Sir John," said the higgler, very mildly. "It will save your worships a great deal of trouble."

"Here! pass it to me — make haste, sir!" cried Sir John, to a slow moving usher. "You officers ought to have been prepared with your witnesses, and not have given the Bench so much trouble."

The letter had reached Sir John's hands by the time he had done speaking, and he read it with evident surprise.

"Dear me, very odd! Gentlemen, we had better adjourn to our private room," said Sir John, rising, the gout giving him an ugly twinge at the moment, and producing an expletive not quite in accordance with the judicial character.

As the J. P.s retired from the bench, the sensation in the small court-house was immense! The only unmoved persons were the prisoners at the bar, until the higgler whispered something in the ear of the minstrel, which set that stupid person into limited hysterics. The magistrates' bell rung, and the spectators in court buzzed. Now for the explanation! No — the two prisoners were ordered into the magistrates' room, and in a few minutes after an officer came out, to announce sulkily that business was over for the day.

In the afternoon, the mysterious higgler and his faithful minstrel were seen smoking their pipes in front of the inn in the market place, when the three o'clock coach from London drove up to change horses.

Mr. Gilbert Norwold had arrived by it, as well as a small parcel addressed to Mr. John Jones, and for which the higgler had made previous inquiry. He dropped it carelessly into the pocket of his shooting jacket, and continued smoking his pipe until the coach and its attendant porters, ostlers and idlers, had departed. The parcel contained a letter, which appeared to dictate to the higgler a course of immediate action, as he instantly walked rapidly to the court-house, and sought an interview with the town-clerk. We shall learn more of his business presently.

Gilbert Norwold's reception by his father was anything but affectionate or satisfactory. His College bills were large — very large — and contrasted unfavourably with the more moderate expenditure of his brother Gerard; and as this condition of things made Sir John's reproaches more acute, Gilbert felt the anger he had nourished in his heart for many weeks past against Gerard turn almost into hatred. Humiliated and wrathful, he sought his own room; and recalling all he had lately suffered by the inspiration of Gerard, the moral poison worked within him until it destroyed at once, and for ever, all brotherly union between them.

As Gilbert's return had been unexpected, Gerard had gone with Spraggatt to a neighbouring market, and was, consequently, not at the Hall to receive him.

Gilbert was glad of this; the more so, as he had resolved, when he could see his mother alone, to make to her the terrible disclosure of his turpitude. Lady Norwold, however, had been so distressed by her husband's violence in the morning, that she had retired to her own room, and given emphatic orders that she was not to be disturbed by any one that day. Poor lady!

Gilbert bore with this patiently, for he dreaded the ordeal, and gladly accepted the compulsory respite until the morrow. He was not destined to be the arbiter of his own fate.

The Miller Ray had just sat down to tea in his little parlour when the two county constables, who had been so at fault in the morning, entered the room without ceremony, looking like men who were sure of their game this cast. The miller started, naturally enough, at the advent of the two officers, who, without waiting to be questioned, declared him to be their prisoner.

"Prisoner! Your prisoner!" said Ray, with a loud laugh. "Why, you are mad!"

No, they were dull fellows enough, but they were not mad. They had their wits — such as they were — about them; for one placed his back against the door, and the other took his stand at the open window looking into the miller's garden.

"We've a warrant to take you into custody, Mr. Ray, for the charge of being directly and indirectly concerned in several burglaries in this county and in

London. The warrant's signed by a Bow Street magistrate, and I produce my authority," said one of the officers.

Ray glanced at the strip of paper, and did not laugh again, but attempted to pour out a cup of tea. His hand shook so violently that he abandoned the attempt.

"We are sorry our duty obliges us to trouble you with these," said the officer who had spoken, producing a pair of handcuffs; "but we've no choice in the matter, and must do our duty."

The miller's powerful frame shook from head to heel as the glittering manacles were extended towards him.

"Stay, my good friends. I will not attempt an escape; but you have taken me so by surprise — made such an unfounded charge against me — that I am quite unmanned. I'll take a glass of brandy, and —"

"No," said the officer, interposing, "how do we know it is brandy you are going to take. I hope you won't be rusty, but let me put on the handcuffs like a man."

"You are right to be careful. I know it is your duty, and submit. You will not object to send one of my men with a note to Mr. Jellifer in the market-place?" said Ray.

The officer did not object, and Ray wrote a few lines requesting Jasper's instant attendance. The man was called, he who had witnessed so unwillingly the signing of the papers a short time ago, and dispatched

with the letter. Ray then sullenly submitted his wrists to the fetters, and the three men sat in silence until Jasper came in.

"What is the meaning of this?" said Jellifer. "What has happened?"

"I am in custody," replied Ray, deliberately measuring his words as he spoke. "I am in custody on the charge of being concerned, directly or indirectly, in certain burglaries committed in this county and in London. That is the charge, I believe, is it not?"

"Yes, sir; them's the words of our warrant," replied the officer appealed to.

"As the warrant is signed by a Bow Street magistrate, I shall be taken, I conclude, to London to-night."

Jasper sank into a chair, and appeared to be overpowered by the perilous situation of his friend.

"I don't want a woman's nonsense, now," said Ray. "I want a man to act for me. You must follow me to-morrow, if you cannot come with me to-night. You understand, and I shall expect you. You will take possession of the mill, and see that some one is put in charge whom you can thoroughly trust."

"Oh, we shall take care of your property, Mr. Ray, depend upon that," said one of the officers with a smile.

Ray smiled also as he replied: "You are clever, careful fellows, I don't doubt; but as I am certain to be acquitted of this charge, I would rather make my own arrangements."

Jasper promised to do all that was required of him, and when he shook hands with Ray, as the officers were taking him away, he found left in his own a piece of paper, which he carefully concealed until the final departure of the prisoner and his escort.

On opening the crumpled slip he read thus: "Secure all the papers in the H. C." Having read the line twice over, Jasper tore the paper into very small pieces, and then scattered them to the winds. If he understood the meaning of what he had read, he was too prudent or too good a man to aid a suspected felon in defeating the course of justice, and it was well for him that he acted as he did, for standing near the window, and looking into the room, was Mr. Higgler, in a very different costume to that he was pleased to wear in the morning, as was Cobby, the minstrel, also. They now had blue coats, with metal buttons, and very bright red waist-coats, which they were entitled to wear as Bow Street runners. Cobby could not change his stupid face, but he had removed the straight haired wig and bushy eyebrows, and displayed his own short crop of bright red stubble, and no eyebrows at all.

"Well, Mr. Jellifer," said Higgler, that being his proper name, and in no way connected with his ornithological calling, "my friend Mr. Cobby and I have come to relieve you from your responsibilities, and take possession of the mill for a short time."

"Very glad to hear it," said Jasper; "but I suppose I had better send some one here for the present."

"Well, perhaps you had," replied Higgler. "Cobby, call the other constable."

Mr. Cobby proved his possession of other musical qualifications than those with which we are already acquainted, and by putting his two fingers into his mouth, and distending his rubicund cheeks, he produced a whistle with variations that might have been heard, and possibly was, in the market place of Morden. A feeble squeal responded, followed by the appearance of another rural thief-taker, and who had more the appearance of a gamekeeper than of any other profession.

"Now, Master Johnny," said Higgler, addressing the new comer, who stared at the name presented to him, "Now, Master Johnny, help my friend Mr. Cobby and myself to remove this iron chest."

There was not much difficulty in effecting this operation, and when it was done a small trap door was discernible on the spot the chest had occupied.

"Locked, I fancy, Cobby?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but you have the plan in your pocket."

Higgler drew forth a piece of paper, on which were traced certain lines and references, and having consulted it, he went directly to the portrait, or Hassarac's Cave, and pressing the secret spring, obtained an insight into that ingenious receptacle.

Producing from it two keys, tied together, he soon unlocked the trap door, and discovered a Hassarac's Cave, indeed; for there lay, in admired confusion,

much plate and many jewels. Amongst the former, the communion plate of Morden Church, battered and defaced, was conspicuous. Higgler expressed no surprise, nor did Cobby, neither did Jasper, strange to say; but possibly he was prepared to learn the worst of Ray, having once had his suspicions aroused. A careful inventory was made of the various articles discovered, and then the iron chest was opened. It contained only Ray's account books, but one of them was kept in cipher. This Higgler secured, but upon Jasper objecting to its removal, on the plea that it might be wanted in the business, Higgler returned it to the chest with a knowing smile at Mr. Jellifer.

"Let us see what more is inside this respectable old party," said Higgler, standing on a chair and looking behind the portrait, "some more keys, a cigar box — extravagant rascal — a bundle of papers, and a cash box. I wonder what that contains? Nothing valuable I expect, as it is unlocked." Mr. Higgler glanced carelessly over the contents of the box until he came to two pieces of paper enclosed in the cover of a letter. He read them very attentively, and then placed them in his waistcoat pocket. It was surprising how unconcerned Jasper had been throughout this discovery of his friend's delinquencies, but there was a look of wonder in his face when Higgler pocketed the papers.

"Now, Master Johnny, ask for a sack, and you shall take these precious matters to the court-house in the cart you brought with you." The constable obeyed.

"You'll have to stay here, Mr. Cobby, for a time, I fancy; but no doubt Mr. Jellifer will see the miller's maid — of course there is one? — and take care that you are made very comfortable. Eh! Mr. Jellifer."

Jasper undertook to give instructions to have Mr. Cobby duly installed as master of the situation, although the miller's arrest had thrown his terrified household into considerable confusion.

The cart having received its precious freight, in addition to the portly persons of Mr. Higgler and the county constable, was about to be driven off, when Mr. Higgler beckoned Jasper to him, and said in a whisper, "Meet me at Norwold Hall to-night, at nine."

"At the Hall!" said Jasper, turning very pale at so simple a request.

"Yes, at nine o'clock, not a minute later, if you please, Mr. Jellifer," answered Mr. Higgler, like a man not to be questioned, and then gave the word to proceed.

Mr. Ray's case was very soon disposed of by Sir John and his fellow magistrates, who had been specially summoned; and the miller, escorted by another Bow Street runner, who had come down in the morning specially to take charge of him, left Morden for ever by the afternoon's coach.

Sir John had arranged to take an early dinner with one of his brother magistrates, and though suffering slightly from gout, remained until nearly nine o'clock, not having been able to resist the temptation of some excellent old port selected by the late Bishop of the Diocese. He rode home unattended, and had

nearly reached the house end of the avenue when he was surprised by Mr. Higgler stepping from the shadow of a tree and politely requesting permission to speak a few words with him in private.

"Why not have told me your business this afternoon, Mr. Higgler — I have had enough of justice for one day. Won't to-morrow do?"

"No, Sir John, as I must return to London by the earliest coach I can get, and my communication concerns you and your family so nearly, that I am sure you'll excuse me making so bold as to ask you to listen to me now."

"What out here in this night air. No, I — if I do.

"As you please, Sir John, only it must be where we are alone," replied Higgler.

"What's in the wind now?" cried Sir John. "Come along after me, Higgler — We'll stop at the keeper's cottage."

The cottage was close at hand, and the keeper out on his evening round, so the wife was sent on to the Hall with the quiet old cob, and Sir John and the officer were left alone.

"Now then, Higgler, make haste and tell me your business. My gout promises to be troublesome to-night, and I want to get to bed early. What is it?"

Higgler had opened the door leading into the back kitchen, to satisfy himself that there were no listeners, — an act of professional caution, — and then standing by the table, at which Sir John was seated, he said: "When searching the hiding places in the

house of the man Ray, this afternoon, I lighted in one of them, on two bits of writing, which as they have nothing to do with the charges under investigation, I took the liberty of putting into my pocket."

"Well, what are they about? Let me see them," said Sir John, testily, as his foot was getting rather painful.

"One moment, if you please, sir; I fancy they will surprise you even more than they did me, and I wish you to consider them as coolly as you can," observed Higgler.

"I'm always cool, sir! Always when business is before me. Give me the papers."

Higgler presented one of them, but as the light was failing, the Baronet requested him to read it, as he already knew its contents, and Higgler did so. It was Gerard's engagement to repay any money advanced to his brother, and was worded as follows: —

"I undertake to repay you any sum you may advance, provided the money is forthcoming immediately.

"GERARD NORWOLD."

The date was within a month of the time of this conversation.

"What's that?" cried Sir John, springing up and snatching the paper from Higgler's hand. He hurried with it to the window. When he had read it, he exclaimed, "The young scoundrel, I remember about that time he applied to me for 50*l*., and I refused him.

And then he had recourse to a common thief," — but our page must not be sullied by the fearful words that came from the lips of the infuriated man. It was some time before he could speak calmly, at last he said: "Well, Higgler, that money must be paid, thief though the fellow be who lent it. You must see to that for me. Well, now for the other paper! What's that about?"

"I really fear to give it to you, Sir John, seeing how you are affected by your son's indiscretion."

"Indiscretion, why — but never mind, I have had my burst out, and I won't give way again," said Sir John, holding out his hand for the paper. He paused, however, and then asked Higgler to read it to him.

It was a sad record.

"'I hereby acknowledge to hold as security for the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, advanced by me to Mr. Norwold.'" Higgler paused.

"Go, on! sir, go, on! There can't be anything worse than that."

"Don't be so sure, sir," said Higgler, who then continued to read. "'A miniature portrait of Sir John Norwold, set with diamonds. The same to be returned, when the said sum of 250*l.* is repaid to me.

"RAYMOND RAY.'"

The date a day after the other.

Sir John did not move when Higgler ceased reading, neither did he say one word until a little stream

of blood trickled from one of his nostrils. The relief thus afforded soon restored him to himself again, and he spoke much more composedly than he had done during the interview.

"My good fellow, you have rendered me a great service in bringing these papers to me. I don't understand them at present, but I will before I sleep. My honour, the honour of all my family, dead and living, is concerned in this matter, perhaps. You shall not go unrewarded for your consideration. You see I am not quite myself just now. I shall be in the morning. Don't you leave Morden without seeing me again, and I will hold you harmless with your superiors. Good night, Mr. Higgler."

As he said this, he folded the papers carefully one within the other, and placed them in his pocket, and, having repeated his valediction two or three times, strode at a rapid pace to the Hall, as though the gout had never been known to him. As the hall door was unfastened until the family retired to rest, Sir John entered freely, and passed at once to the drawing-room, in which were seated Lady Norwold and Gilbert, she having left her room on hearing of her son's arrival. They both were reading. When she looked up, hearing the door open, she was alarmed and terrified at her husband's appearance, as the blood had stained the large frill of his shirt, and his face was deadly pale.

"O my dear Sir John, what has happened? Are you hurt?"

"Yes," he replied; "but not as you suppose. Come with me; I want you!"

Gilbert sat panic-stricken as his mother left the room. No other word had been spoken than those we have recorded; but he knew — he felt certain that his guilty secret had been discovered, and he was lost! utterly lost! He could not have moved! he could not have spoken one word, even to have saved himself from ruin, for his limbs were powerless, and his tongue dried up within his mouth. No chance of escape! None. All the evil he had done and thought, to hide this miserable theft, had been wickedness in vain.

Unless — he went on? Ah! there was another pact to be made with the fiend that had so tempted him! Would he listen to it?

When Sir John had reached the drawing-room containing Lady Norwold's cabinet, he paused, and looking his wife in the face, said slowly: "Emily, on your honour as a wife — as a noble lady, answer me truly. Have you ever — for any purpose — at any time — lent valuables to *my* son, or to *our* son?"

"My dear husband, never!" replied the wife.

"Then open that cabinet."

It was done.

"Take out your jewels. No; not those. Ah! that case."

As she removed the object to which he had pointed, he took it from her saying, "What should this contain?"

"Your miniature; the one you gave me on your birthday the first year of our marriage."

He opened it, and showed her that it was empty.

Lady Norwold gave a shrill scream — it reached Gilbert sitting in the drawing-room — and then she swooned in her husband's arms.

Her cry brought some of the servants to her assistance, and when she recovered, and before Sir John could say more, she proclaimed her loss, but not knowing whom to accuse. When she became calmer, Sir John conducted her to the drawing-room just as Gerard had returned from his pleasant holiday with Jack Spraggatt.

"You have returned in good time, sir," said Sir John to Gerard, before he could greet his brother. "Stand where you are until I have done with you. You know a man, a dishonest thief, named Raymond Ray."

"No, sir, I do not!"

"You are a liar, sir! a liar to your father. Is not that your writing?" — and Sir John showed him one of the papers.

"Yes, Sir John, I own that to be my writing; but ——" Gerard paused, it was his brother's secret, not his, that was asked of him.

"This morning that paper was in Ray's possession, and yet you dare lie to me, and say the man was unknown to you."

"I do not lie, Sir John, nor shall you say so uncontradicted," replied Gerard, his blood rising at the

accusation. "I own the paper to be my writing — the obligation to be mine, and for no unworthy purpose."

"There was more money had from that man — a much larger sum."

"Yes, there was a larger sum required and obtained." It was Gilbert's secret still that was demanded from him.

"On what security?"

Gerard raised his shoulders merely in reply; to have spoken would have implicated Lady Norwold.

"Again, I demand to know on what security? If you do not at once reply, and reply truly, though you are my son — my heir," (no! the oath must not be recorded), "I will turn you out into the world a beggar."

Gerard knew his father's violent temper, and guarded his reply,

"I cannot tell you the security that was given."

"You dare not, you degenerate cub. You dare not confess that you have so far forgotten your father's name, your dead ancestors, your own honour, as to own that you have stooped to be a thief, and the companion of thieves."

"This is past endurance, Sir John Norwold. You forget that you are my father, and compel me to lose a son's reverence. I tell you that you speak words you would not dare utter to any other man living that claims to be a gentleman."

"A gentleman! You have lost the title to be

called even an honest man. Read that paper, if the words do not blind you — there is evidence of your shameful theft!"

Gerard took the paper, and as he read it, a faintness overcame him, for he now divined the truth! Whilst he stood thus overpowered, Sir John, whose rage had risen to its height, turned to Gilbert, who almost crouched at his mother's side, and said with violent action and terrible words: "You knew of this? You must have known of this! and you were silent? Speak fellow!"

"He is my brother, sir. He is my brother!"

Those words which the Evil One spoke by the mouth of Gilbert sealed Gerard's fate.

With fearful oaths the maddened father drove his generous son forth from his home that night never again to stand beneath its roof. The father's curses clung about the walls long after they were uttered, and not even the purifying fire could destroy the memory of them!

CHAPTER VIII.

Gerard has Need of True Friends, and Finds Them. Not so Miller Ray.

THE moon in the heavens was as bright as Gerard's young life had been an hour before, but at intervals it was obscured by clouds, black and impenetrable as the change which had come upon him. He remembered walking from the lighted drawing-room through the crowd of domestics assembled round the opened doors, and passing down the stairs and through the hall, out unto the park. He remembered passing down the old avenue, dark as a great vault, and seeing the glittering of the lights in the town of Morden, hearing all the while the loud voice of his excited father repeating the awful words which cursed him and sent him forth a wanderer. His walk through Norwold Park, from the Hall to the little bridge which crossed the mill-stream never left his memory — never. He believed that he must have crossed the river without going through the market-place, but why he did so he could not conceive, as he remembered nothing more than this — that when he had crossed the mill-stream he entered the church porch — his dead mother was at rest within the church — and there he vowed never again to set foot in Norwold Hall! Never to see his father's face again! That when the night should have

passed, he would be "as one that was dead." And once he tried to pray to be forgiven his trespasses, as he should forgive them who had trespassed against him; but he felt the words he uttered were only words. His thoughts were all entangled one with another! The bright drawing-room, the dark avenue, the passionate father, the listening servants passed and repassed before his eyes, whilst the awful words which cursed him, and made him an outcast, were roaring in his ears.

Jack Spraggatt had put on his slippers preparatory to going to bed, and Lucy had risen also, when they heard a violent thud at the front door, as though some heavy body had fallen against it, and then followed a rapid knocking. Jack had the heart of a lion, so he hastened to answer the summons; and Lucy, who was as brave as a loving woman always is, followed, carrying a light. Jack asked who knocked?

"Gerard Norwold."

Absurd, that was not Gerard's voice, those hollow, husky sounds. The door was opened at once, and there, with haggard face, great staring eyes, red as fire, and disordered hair, — no hat had been cared for — stood the dearest friend of the household, Gerard Norwold.

Before either Jack or Lucy could speak a word, he stalked into the parlour, and sat himself down in the chair which death had made vacant, looking not unlike the phantom of himself. Jack's bold heart beat so fast that he could not question his friend; whilst

Lucy, with ready coolness, mixed some brandy with water, and then held the glass to Gerard's lips, who drank the draught readily. It revived him, and he seemed to recognise the place — the friends — and then covering his face with both his hands, he gently sank down on his knees, and crouched, as it were, upon the ground.

Lucy and Jack knelt down on either side of him, and implored him to speak. Speak! when great sobs were bursting from his heaving breast, and hot tears flowing from his burning eyes.

He suffered himself to be raised up after a time, and when he was calm enough to articulate words — the words were nothing, but his passionate utterance kept the listeners silent — he said:

"My friends — my only friends now in the world, I have come to you in the excess of my misery — I know not why — I know not for what — but I have come here without reasoning — by the mere instinct of our long friendship, Jack — and of yours, Lucy Spraggatt — knowing I should find some human thing that would not look at me like a fiend, curse me like a fiend, and drive me out into the world as though I were the wickedest creature living."

He paused, but before either of his auditors could speak, he went on as though unwilling to be interrupted, until he had "unpacked his heart."

"To-night — to-night my father — before his wife, before his servants, has called me a thief, and with

horrible, most horrible curses, turned me out of his house. Do either of you believe me a thief?"

He started up, and looked at his two listeners.

"I see you do not. If I had seen the shadow of doubt in your face, Lucy, or in yours, Jack, I should have gone mad! — stark mad!"

Again the sobs and tears!

"Gerard Norwold a ——. No! I will not repeat the word," cried Jack. "Nor can I guess why such an epithet could be applied to you — and by your father?"

"Yes, by my father! my own father! No inquiry! No consideration of circumstances! But a conclusion formed in passion, in madness! and he has dared to stigmatise me — his heir — his own flesh and blood, as a thief! a mean, dishonourable thief! And those who listened believed it; for not one of my kindred, not one of the servants, who had known me from my cradle, dared to deny the possibility of such a name being deserved by me."

He walked rapidly up and down the room, and no one spoke for some time.

"I confess, Gerard," said Jack, "that I am at a loss to understand what has happened. If it will not distress you, tell me; or perhaps you would rather go to rest, and in the morning ——"

"In the morning, Jack, I hope to be many miles away from here. Don't interrupt me, if you please. I wish, when I can master myself, to tell you what has occurred."

"Perhaps, Mr. Gerard, I had better leave the room," said Lucy.

"No, Lucy — no — I wish you to hear from my own lips a story that will be repeated, I doubt not, often enough when I am gone. I could not endure to think that you should ever have occasion to blush that you have owned me for a friend."

He then as calmly as though nothing particular had occurred, revealed the events of the evening, from the time he had parted from Jack, dwelling upon the minutest details, naming the people he had seen, the objects which had attracted his notice, as though he were anxious to delay reaching that point in his narrative when his father made the cruel accusation against him.

"From that time," he said, "I remember nothing distinctly, except my father's awful curses, and his damnable accusation. If anything else was said, I heard it not — I saw nothing but that incensed and cruel man, until I turned away to quit his house, and then I met the glaring faces of the servants! I know that they stood on either side to let me pass through them — that the hall-door was open to hasten my departure. That the avenue looked like a monstrous vault, which the glittering lights beyond made darker and more dismal. I turned to look back once upon the old Hall. It was discernible only by the lights seen through the windows. A momentary burst of moonlight fell upon it, and then the dark thick clouds hid it again. I stood in the church-porch, as it were,

by my mother's grave, and vowed to renounce home, name, and kindred for ever; and I will keep my oath! How I came here I know not. I know that you two were every now and then in my mind, and so I wandered on, I suppose. You have heard my story — Lucy — Jack — and when it is told by others, I know you will deny — as I do now from the depths of my heart — that I ever did knowingly, a dishonourable act in my short life. Now, good-bye, my dear old friends. Give me some covering for my head, and I will be off again."

"Not to-night, Mr. Gerard."

"Yes, Lucy, to-night. In the pauses of our conversation I have resolved upon the course I mean to take. If that proud, passionate old man has one spark of a father's love in his heart, I will blow it into a flame which shall torment him to repentance."

"Surely," said Jack, "you will make an effort to disprove the charge made against you."

"I might have done so had I had a father to deal with, and not a madman. To free myself, I must condemn others to the same fate as that my father has decreed to me. The vow I made to-night — rash, wicked, as it may be — I will keep! My dear friends, good-bye. I am obeying my father, my wicked unjust father, and parting from you is not the least of the miseries to which he has condemned me."

"Oh, Mr. Gerard," cried Lucy, clasping his hand in hers. "Do not! do not go away to-night with such a troubled spirit as now possesses you. Stay here un-

til the morning; — stay here until you have prayed to God to guide you aright, and go not away with only your great wrong and your bitter grief to direct you. You have always been good, noble and generous, and be sure that your father will remember this to-morrow, and know that he has been deceived, and you will be dearer to him than you have ever been, and he to you."

"Lucy, he has cursed with the words of a fiend — he has believed me capable of dishonour. Neither love, nor the recollection of what my past life has been, weighed as one feather in my favour. He has driven me forth, and the punishment shall be shared between us! I can endure, and I will revenge my wrongs."

"It is right to endure, it is wrong to revenge," said Lucy, as though a reproving angel spoke. "Do not, Mr. Gerard, leave us to-night. Stay here for a few days, at least, until you have recovered from the first shock of this unaccountable injury. You cannot find more truthful, loving friends than you have here, and you have seen in our own case so recently that it is not good to bear our grief alone. Think me your sister, Mr. Gerard, and believe what I would do to comfort you in this distress. The neglected scratch, so slight in itself, grows dangerous and painful; the ghastly wound, deep almost to death, is rendered often an aid to future health when carefully tended, even by unskilful hands. Let us be your surgeons, Mr. Gerard. Do not leave us with this great wound in your heart,

which may become so dangerous as to destroy your peace of mind for ever."

"You will stay, Gerard, I am sure you will," said Jack, trying to take his friend's hand; but he drew it away, closing his fingers firmly together.

"I dare not stay near that accursed house yonder, remembering what has been said, and knowing who are within its walls. Chance might make me a parricide. No, I will fly beyond that danger. I dare not pray, or I would say, God bless you both."

"Stop one moment, Gerard!" He was moving towards the door. "Since you are determined to go, you must not go alone; I shall go with you. Lucy, my boots, dear." His sister was not surprised at Jack's resolution. She knew that he would not desert his friend in the strait in which he was, and left the room, returning in a few moments, bringing a fur travelling cap belonging to herself, as all her brother's head-gear was much too large for Gerard.

"What is this?" he said. "I remember! your travelling cap, Lucy. Thanks; I am glad to carry something of you with me. It will help to keep down evil thoughts, perhaps, and to remind me that one spot on earth contains two friends true as steel." As though it were a thing of course, he took her head between his hands, and kissed her forehead. "I will go into the porch whilst you get ready, good, true, honest, old Jack," and then he left the room.

Jack soon pulled on his boots, and stowed away the flask which Lucy had filled, and hastened to join

Gerard; but when he looked into the porch no one was there. He called "Gerard! Gerard!" but no answer came. Jack hastened to the road, but the night was very dark, and the light wind rustled in the trees, so that he could neither see nor hear anything of the run-away. With a heavy heart, Jack returned into the house, and then he and Lucy sat long into the early morning talking of poor Gerard and his changed fortunes, and sowing seeds that bore abundant fruit hereafter.

It was eight o'clock when the tidiest of old ladies was surprised at her breakfast by the appearance of Gerard Norwold. Her little handmaiden was surprised also to hear her mistress cry with delight, and hug that road-stained, haggard-looking man to her capacious bosom. He had often lain there when a helpless babe, and drawn from its living fountains the life he now valued no longer. Yes, Mrs. Bland had been Gerard's nurse, as after he was born his mother was long an invalid, and Gerard owed much of his iron constitution to the then buxom widow Bland, whose only child had died the same day as her young husband. Baby Gerard therefore succeeded to all the poor widow's love, and as her mother's fancy saw in the heir of Norwold's face the lineaments of her own dead child, he became to her a son indeed, making her love almost idolatry. Gerard never passed a vacation without visiting Nurse Bland frequently, though she lived some ten miles from the town of Morden. No wonder, then, that he brought his bruised heart to her for cure.

It was strange, he thought, that she had not been the earliest remembered when the blow came, — even before Jack and Lucy, — and so thought she when he had told her the story of the past day and night.

"My darling boy, my dear darling boy," said the old nurse — all the motherly feelings of other days returning, "I never thought this hour would come, although your beloved mother often foreboded some such evil times. Sir John was always a vile tempered man; brutal ever, when his angry fits were on him; and they were so frequent that they wore away your mother's life long before her time. When she felt that she was dying, she said to me — oh! so calmly — so sweetly: 'Nurse, I shall soon leave you, and my dear child will have no mother then but you. Care for him as you have done; and for his sake, and for my sake, bear with my husband's fearful temper, and do not be driven from our darling boy. You promise me this?' I did, of course; and kept it through many and many a day of sore trial, Gerard. Your mother went on to say: 'Nearly all my small fortune I have given at various times to help my husband in the payment of his debts. There is, however, enough in this pocket-book to keep you from want, and find you a humble home. Earn it, dear Nurse, by what you will have to bear for the love of my darling — for the love of his dying mother.'

"I did bear what few could have borne; but you had been sent to me by Heaven when my own sweet babe and his honest loving father had been taken

from me: and I loved you dearer than my life. Thank God that you have come here in your trouble. It is your mother's home that shelters you. It is your mother's bounty that I now ask you to share."

Poor Gerard! The voice of the old nurse retained the same music as had soothed his earliest sorrows, and he did not resist when she laid his head upon her bosom. He soon recovered his composure, and then having eaten and drank, though sparingly, he retired to her bedroom — the nursery he called it, with the first smile his face had worn for many hours, and obtained the repose he so much needed.

He slept soundly through the night, and when he awoke he found Nurse Bland sitting by the side of his bed, as she had done hundreds of times before, when he was hardly more helpless than at present. He was feverish and prostrate, but his old nurse was skilful in the healing arts required for his restoration, and by the end of the third day, he had talked over and over again the cruel past, but without finding any relief for the agony it occasioned him.

It was late in the evening when he bade his kind old nurse farewell, and though her tears fell fast, yet there was no hopeless sorrow in her honest face, and so with her we bid adieu to Gerard Norwold.

The river which flowed past Morden, a sluggish stream, widened on its passage to the sea, and receiving two important tributaries a few miles below the town, became a rapid river. On the banks, near the confluence of the lower stream, a coat and waistcoat were

found on the morning following, and on the lining of both was written "Gerard Norwold." Such a fact proved nothing, whatever surmise it occasioned, and when Sir John was told of the discovery, he laughed scornfully, and denounced it as, "A trick — a very stale trick, which could deceive no one but a fool."

The time was approaching when he would have given all his wealth to have known the truth.

Jack Spraggatt was not so easily satisfied. As soon as the story reached him, he set off at once, and for three days continued his inquiries and search, on both sides of the river, and it was not until the third day that he bethought him of Mrs. Bland, and that possibly her foster-son might have gone to her in the hour of his greatest need. Jack met with a cordial welcome from the old nurse, by whom he was well known and esteemed, and after an hour's serious talk with her, he sought for Gerard Norwold no more, and ever after studiously avoided speaking of his friend's disappearance, although for some time both he and Lucy wore a slight mourning in memory of their friend.

We must return to the Hall, soon to be deserted for other scenes and unexpected changes. Sir John's rage had not exhausted itself on the hapless Gerard, and when he left his ancestors' house at his father's bidding, it raged for a time against the guilty and terrified Gilbert. With the same vehemence as he had used in discarding one son, did he threaten to visit with a similar consequence any further disobedience

on the part of the other, and almost included his trembling wife in this denunciation. A momentary compunction which Gilbert had felt at his brother's undeserved fate, and which might have impelled him to have confessed the truth had a gentler course been pursued, died away under his father's continued violence, and when he left the room, almost fainting with terror, he went forth like another Cain, fearing that his brother's wrong would cry out from the very walls. He walked into the garden, and the cool night air revived him slightly. It was well for him, he thought, that Ray had been taken to London before the discovery had been made, which was now only known to his father and the family. Yes, there was Jasper Jellifer! He might lead suspicion towards him, if he thought it would serve his ends. No, his mother was engaged to interest herself with Sir John, and Jasper would not make her his enemy by uttering any conjecture that would injure her son. So he strove to lull his guilty conscience into a little peace.

Higgler had brought Jasper to the Hall to prove Ray's writing on the memorandum relating to the bracelet, which, strange to say, could not be found or traced anywhere.

Jasper's testimony was not required, as he was, of course, entirely ignorant of Ray's proceedings. He had believed him a clever pushing fellow, and as such they had had dealings together; but of his nefarious pursuits Jasper had never entertained a suspicion, and

he feared that he should be a loser by the confidence he had reposed in him.

Mr. Higgler smiled as Mr. Jellifer made this statement.

Jasper was evidently a true friend either to Ray or to himself, for he had sacrificed the comfort of his home to secure the property at the mill, and had placed Mrs. Jellifer in possession. This lady gave little Cobby infinite trouble, as she was as restless as a ghost, and glided about from one place to another, so, that the wary Bow Street runner, from professional habit, felt compelled to follow her, and neglect his beloved dulcimer, which was at once his solace and delight. There was no doubt Mrs. Jellifer had a reason for this inquisitiveness. Sir John had offered £100 for the recovery of the bracelet, and, as this liberal reward was, she thought, a secret between herself and Jasper, she set earnestly to work to deserve it; but the cleverest of us are but fools, and whilst Mrs. Jellifer was searching the mill diligently, Cobby was on the watch continuously, knowing her purpose, and would have pounced upon her and the treasure trove, and claimed half the reward. Mr. Higgler took a more direct course to discover the missing jewels.

Ray had been brought up several times before the Bow Street magistrates, and numerous charges of receiving stolen goods, both in London and the provinces, having been proved against him, he was committed to Newgate for trial. Newgate prison was a terrible contrast to the pretty home which Ray had

just quitted. It would have been terrible even now-a-days when so much has been done to mitigate the olden cruelties, when the prisoners within its gloomy walls were packed away like slaves in the hold of a slave ship, and lived like human devils, in the midst of profanity and drunken riot. The untried and the condemned were herded together, at the mercy of venal warders, who made a profit of their vices when they had money, or left them almost to starve if they had not the means to bribe their gaolers, or procure the necessaries of life. The grim smoke-blackened walls of the great London prison, were a sad exchange for the neatly-clipped hedges of the miller's garden, and the brutal songs of the half-drunken prisoners, for the twittering and melodious notes of the happy birds, and the fierce besotted faces which met him at every turn, for the pleasant flowers then blossoming in all their beauty. The murky cell and hard pallet, haunted by the memories of hundreds of criminals, some of whom had hung upon Tyburn tree, or had suffered out the remnants of their evil lives in Van Diemen's Land, or the worse *Inferno* of Norfolk Island. Murderers, forgers, burglars, highwaymen, and even such as he, Raymond Ray, the tempter to crimes he had not the courage to commit, had preceded him as occupants of the narrow dungeon wherein he must abide until he also should go forth to endure for years and years the bitter lot of a transported convict. He could not sleep at first with such horrible thoughts always at work in his once clever-scheming brain, but exhausted nature

yielded at last, and the gaol-bird ceased to flutter in his gloomy cage.

Jasper came to see him as often as the prison rules allowed him to do so, but then they spoke to each other with iron gratings between them, and the visitor left no hope behind when he departed. Jasper never spoke of the diamond bracelet, prudent man that he was, fearing to invoke suspicion of complicity in Ray's criminality in the mind of any chance listener. Not so, Mr. Higgler, who had requested an interview with the prisoner the day after his committal to Newgate.

"Good day, Mr. Ray," said the officer, "I suppose you bear no ill-will to a man who has only done his duty, and will not object to a few minutes' conversation with me."

"None in the least," replied Ray; "I have not too much pleasant society in this infernal place. What have you to say, sir?"

"I suppose, Mr. Ray, that you have calculated the chances of the game you have been playing so many years, and are not afraid to pay your losings manfully. You have had a long run of luck, but I fancy you see that you are beat at last."

"I don't know that," answered Ray. "A jury may think me as innocent as I am."

"No doubt of it," replied Higgler, knowingly; "and if they do, your position will be a bad one. It is no use fencing the question with me, Mr. Ray. I could not, if I wished, make your case worse than it is, and

you know it. I have not come to try to do so, but to see if I cannot square a certain matter between us, and make things easier for you."

Ray's heart beat quickly, for he thought there was a hope of escape in the officer's words.

"I don't understand you at present," he said. "You must speak more plainly, if you please."

"I will. When I was searching the mill, I found two pieces of paper behind the portrait in the corner of the parlour. They had reference to certain money transactions between you and young Norwold. They had nothing to do with my charge against you, and so I have not produced them at present." Higgler paused, and then said abruptly, "What have you done with the diamond bracelet you had in pawn?

Ray was too cool a rogue to be caught so easily.

"That is my affair, Mr. Higgler," he replied. "Why do you want to know, and what am I to gain by telling you?"

"I want to know," said Higgler, "because Sir John wishes it back again, and if you will put me in the way of restoring it, I will make him use his influence in high quarters to ease your sentence. That's plain enough, I hope."

"Sir John can do this, you think; but will he?" asked Ray.

"Yes. He will pay the money lent to any one you please to name. His family honour is concerned, you see; and though he has turned his son Gerard out of doors, he don't wish the matter to go further."

"His son Gerard, did you say?" asked Ray, earnestly.

"Yes. He's a rough customer, is Sir John, and the most violent old fellow I ever met. They say Gerard was his favourite son, and that he'll fret himself to death at his loss. Nevertheless, he cursed him both hot and strong, so that if, as the saying goes, 'Curses come home to roost,' I don't envy the old gentleman his lodgers."

Ray did not appear to hear what Higgler was saying, but sat lost in deep thought. His cool, scheming head was at work again in its old way, and he saw a chance of escape, unperceived by even the wily Bow Street runner.

"Well, Mr. Ray," said that officer, after waiting a minute or so, "what do you say?"

"The bracelet," replied Ray, "is with the man who lent the money. He has been a good friend to me, and I should not like to involve him in any trouble —"

"Jasper Jellifer?" asked Higgler, quickly.

"No. Not Jasper Jellifer, nor any such chicken-hearted fellow like him. I will think the matter over, Mr. Higgler. I conclude Sir John is to pay you for this business, and I will try not to spoil your bargain, if it don't injure myself. Can nothing be done *before* my trial?" said Ray, with emphasis.

"Nothing. The other business is too clear against you, and you know it. Had there been only one case, *that* might have broke down — but there are four —

and you must see that what you hint at is impossible."

"I fear so," replied Ray, sadly. "Well, Mr. Higgler, I shall know the worst on Tuesday; so come to me the day after, and we will talk over the subject again."

Mr. Higgler shook hands in the most friendly manner with the man he had tracked down so cleverly and perseveringly, and parted from him as pleasantly as he could have done had Ray been a pot companion at a tavern door.

Ray slept soundly that night, and the next also, although the morning which followed was to declare his future fate.

As Higgler had prophesied, the cases against Ray were proved too clearly to admit the least doubt of his guilt, and the twelve intelligent men in the jury-box retired, merely as a matter of form, to consider their verdicts, returning in a few minutes after each case to pronounce the word "Guilty," their faces beaming with self-satisfaction at their own acumen.

Then, police officer after police officer, stepped into the witness-box, and told how they had known the prisoner at the bar under many *aliases*. That he had been convicted of swindling, card-sharping, and other mean vices. That he had been long known as a trainer of thieves, and a receiver of stolen goods, but by great cunning and address had eluded detection, until London becoming too dangerous for him, he had disappeared. That Mr. Higgler, from information which

he had received, had found out his whereabouts, and brought him to trial that day. He was thought to have come of a good family, though no one, except a woman he called his sister, and Mr. Jellifer, a neighbour, had cared to own him for many years past.

The sentence was transportation for life.

The persons in court who had heard the trials, and the long catalogue of previous iniquities, stared with wonder, at the pleasant face and manly bearing of the convicted felon, who bowed respectfully to the Bench, and walked firmly, but without bravado, from the bar.

Ray did not sleep that night. The reminiscences of his bad life, recounted by so many witnesses during the past day, kept sleep from his eyes, and the wickedness he had done now began to be his punishment. With the daylight his hardihood returned, and when Higgler came according to promise, Ray had adjusted his mask again, and seemed an unmoved man.

"I have thought over what is to be done," said Ray. "You may tell Sir John that you have brought me to a state of penitence and confession, and so have earned your wages. When you have done that to your satisfaction, bring the old gentleman here, and I will make my own terms with him. I have more to restore to him than his wife's bracelet; and, valuable as that is, he would give a hundred times what it is worth for the other affair."

Mr. Higgler was rather astounded, and would

have fished out Ray's secret if he could have done so, but abandoned the hope of success when the felon said:

"You have nothing more to gain by me, nor I by you. Make what bargain you can with Sir John, my words will be worth the money, be it what it may. As I shall leave here for the hulks in a few days, you had better make an early appointment. You will always find me at home, as I shall quit London without the formality of bidding adieu to my friends. I am not beat yet, Higgler; at least I hope not."

Mr. Higgler, again shaking hands with his friend Raymond, as he now called him, took his departure, and calling a hackney coach, ordered the driver to an hotel at the West-end, where the Norwolds were expected to arrive that day.

CHAPTER IX.

The Felon Ray does more Mischief than he bargains for.

Mrs. Jellifer had gone to London the day before Ray's trial, leaving Mr. Cobby, the man in possession, after thanking him for the constant attention he had paid her during the time they had been together. Mr. Cobby was not surprised at her departure, as the certainty of the miller's fate was known in Morden, and Mr. Cobby had more than once explained to Mrs. Jellifer the state of the law as affecting the miller's property in the event of his being found guilty of the offences with which he was charged. The Crown would then become possessed of all the felon's goods and chattels, and therefore there seemed to be no necessity for Mrs. Jellifer's supervision of the proceedings at the mill. On the second day after the trial, however, when Cobby was relieving the monotony of his existence by performing on his beloved dulcimer, and by no means discoursing most eloquent music himself, he was surprised by the arrival of Mrs. Jellifer, accompanied by a well-dressed gentleman, and two men of humbler appearance.

Cobby went to the door to receive them, but Mrs. Jellifer wishing him a curt good afternoon, brushed past him into the house, and requested her friends to

follow her. Mr. Cobby was a brave man, but he was also a small one, and with a discretion which was to be expected from one of so much worldly experience, he offered no opposition to their ingress.

"What's up now, ma'am," said Mr. Cobby, seeing the lady quietly seat herself in the easy chair he had just vacated, and motion the respectable gentleman to take a place beside her.

"What's up, sir?" replied the lady, with a slight sneer. "If you mean by that to inquire why we are here, I beg to inform you that we have come to take possession of the mill and its contents, and to dispense with your further attendance, Mr. Cobby."

"Dear me," said the officer, "I shall be sorry to have any difference of opinion with a lady for whom I have so much esteem; but you can't take possesion, and you can't dispense with me."

"Indeed, sir, we shall see," replied Mrs. Jellifer.

"Yes, ma'am," said Cobby; "that gratification shall not be denied you;" and diving into a side-pocket of his coat, he produced a little brass staff and an official-looking paper. After carefully opening the latter, he proceeded: "this, ma'am and gentlemen, is a document which I have received this day from London, empowering me to hold, on behalf of the Crown, all the goods and chattels of Raymond Ray, a convicted felon, now lying in His Majesty's gaol of Newgate."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Jellifer, "then I am afraid the Crown will be disappointed for once, as this" — almost snatching a paper from the hands of the respectable

gentleman — "as this is a bond or a bill of sale, or whatever it's called, making over to my husband, Jasper Jellifer, as security for money lent, all that Mr. Raymond Ray was possessed of some time ago; and now I leave you and our lawyer, Mr. Williams, of Lincoln's-inn-fields, London, to fight the matter out between you."

Mrs. Jellifer then rose and left the room.

The legal battle was not of long duration, Mr. Williams being well-known as a highly respectable person to Cobby, and he did not therefore hesitate to accept the assurance of that gentleman, that the document which gave Jasper Jellifer's claim the preference over that of the Crown, was perfectly valid, the more especially as Mrs. Jellifer returned, bringing with her from the mill the affrighted man who had attested the signatures of the parties to the legal instrument. Cobby was by no means cast down at this defeat, but, requesting Mr. Williams to give him a written declaration of the authority under which Mr. Jellifer claimed possession, he pocketed his sceptre and declared his willingness to abdicate.

"I thought we should make short work with you," said Mrs. Jellifer; "no reflection on your size, sir. And now if you will kindly remove yourself, and your box of music, as you're pleased to call it, to some other place, I shall be extremely obliged to you."

Cobby inquired whether it was absolutely necessary that he should retire so precipitately, and whether he might not remain until the morning, as his business

in Morden would then be at an end, and he proposed to return by an early coach to London.

"Well, yes!" said Mrs. Jellifer; "you may remain conditionally."

Cobby inquired the terms on which his evacuation of the mill could be delayed.

"These," said Mrs. Jellifer, with savage emphasis. "As I intend remaining here to-night, to lock-up and make an inventory of certain things, I require that you tie up in its green bag that horrible instrument of torture upon which you are continually thumping; and that, if you want to sing, you go into the mill and remain there until you have exhausted the contents of that 'Little Warbler,' which you seem to have swallowed at some time or the other."

Cobby was hurt, painfully hurt, at the mention of these conditions, and from that hour to the end of his existence, hated Mrs. Jellifer.

It was six o'clock in the evening when Higgler reached the hotel where Sir John Norwold was staying. The old baronet was in an execrable temper, two or three circumstances having occurred to make him more than usually unamiable. One was that he had been engaged with his lawyer for an hour or two in making a new will. He never paused halfway in any course which he had resolved to pursue; and in order to disinherit Gerard as completely as possible, he had willed to his son Gilbert all that he could devise to him. The entailed property was small, as during his father's lifetime Sir John had imprudently allowed

much of it to be sold to pay the heavy election expenses incurred in contesting Morden. Another item was a list of the improvements required in Lady Norwold's wardrobe, and which she declared to be requisite for her proper appearance in public. The slightest reference to such a subject always brought on a violent fit of swearing, and certain allusions to the domestic economy of the ancient Britons strongly adverse to the progress of civilisation. If he had lived in these days of crinoline, Lady Norwold would have gone into society a perfect fright had she conformed to Sir John's notions of amplitude as applied to a lady's skirt. Another circumstance which tended to his irritability was this, he wanted his dinner; and like other savage animals, he growled loudest when he was hungry. Mr. Higgler's mission was made, therefore, under a most unfavourable condition of things; and that worthy officer had to submit to numerous interruptions during the narration of his interview with Ray, all of which would have been distressing to a less regulated mind than that of the Bow Street runner.

It would be worse than useless to give the conversation in detail, as Sir John declared that he would have hung Ray without the formality of a trial, and expressed his regret that such a catastrophe was not awaiting that criminal person with such ornate flourishes of language as prevent repetition. The excommunication of the Jackdaw of Rheims might have been read (had that remarkable objurgatory poem been written) as a blessing beside Sir John's maledictions. Mr. Higgler knew his

man, however, and having heard a great deal of bad language in his time, was patient and enduring. He succeeded at last in obtaining Sir John's promise to meet him at Newgate on the following day, and to amply reward him should Ray's communication prove of the consequence he professed it to be.

Through the long weary night which succeeded Ray's last interview with Higgler, the wretched felon slept but little. The prison clock striking the hours and the quarters roused him from his feverish slumber, and he remembered that the passing minutes brought him nearer to the interview which might produce some mitigation of his dreadful doom, or destroy his best hope of any future peace this side the grave. And then he recalled his past evil deeds, and their bitter consequences to others, and wondered that he had thought so lightly of the usual ending of such a life as his had been, or why he had put those thoughts, when they did come, so readily aside. He remembered also the few evanescent, unsatisfying pleasures which his evil gains had brought him. He had had, it is true, an unwedded mother and a libertine father, who was no father in his love or in the discharge of his duties towards his unhappy boy and girl, and who had allowed them to be reared in short-lived luxury, to be cast upon the world when death transferred his abused wealth to his high-born heirs, who would acknowledge no kindred with those whom the law refused to recognise. He thought of all this wrong, and sought to find some palliation for his own misdeeds in the selfish

cruelty of the dead. But conscience would not admit the plea, and cried out "Guilty" almost as loudly as he had heard that fatal word pronounced in court not very many hours before.

Time, that stays not either for the just or for the unjust brought the hour appointed for Ray's meeting with Sir John Norwold.

Mr. Higgler was waiting to receive the baronet, and to usher him into the governor of Newgate's little office. Sir John had passed a sleepless night also, and looked haggard and nervously excited. He glanced with an angry look at the grim ornaments of the little room. Manacles of notorious malefactors, labelled with their names, as though they were relics too precious to pass into oblivion. Above them, on shelves, were casts of hideous heads, their features distorted by the violent deaths they had died — hideous also, from the crimes with which they were associated, and which had given them their Newgate value. There were two or three more precious relics of the gallows still than those memorials made by the hands of man: there were the skulls, the once living bones of departed scoundrels, not hidden out of man's sight in the earth, but kept as lures to the warder's show-box.

"The place smells of death," Sir John said, and he desired to be taken to Ray, or to have Ray brought to him as soon as possible.

The latter civility might have been accorded him had he been more regardful of the turnkey's feelings, and not spoken disparagingly of his criminal museum;

but having offended the man's professional prejudices, Sir John was led through the gloomy passages of the old prison, along which many had passed on to "dusky death," until he came to the cell wherein Ray was confined, and where he now remained pleading illness, thus avoiding the necessity of taking his place in the felon's yard. As Ray rose up on the entrance of Sir John, his fetters clanked, and sent a cold chill through the frame of his visitor, although, as a magistrate, he was not entirely a stranger to the inside of a prison.

The warder stood waiting at the door until Ray expressed a wish to speak with Sir John alone, and as Higgler had supplied a liberal garnish, the turnkey expressed his willingness to retire, provided Sir John was not afraid.

"Afraid! What do you mean by being afraid, fellow? I never feared any man yet, and don't care for this manacled scoundrel."

The door of the cell, therefore, was closed, and Sir John and the convict were alone together.

"Now then, Ray, what is it you wish to say to me? I should not have come, but I have had so many surprises of late, that perhaps you may have something to astonish me, also."

"I have, Sir John, or I would not have requested your attendance here," said Ray. "You can well believe, sir, that a man with such a dreadful future before him as I have, may strive to get one ray of hope by a boldness which he would not have dared to exhibit under other circumstances; and as two matters

which I have to communicate are of the gravest importance I believe to you, I must make conditions before I speak."

Sir John was disposed to use harsh words, and to call bad names, but at last deigned to ask to have the conditions named.

"I propose to reveal to you the most important secret first, and I require your promise that, if my revelation be of the value I profess it to be, you shall exert your influence in my behalf, and obtain some mitigation of my terrible sentence. I mean, sir, to obtain for me, when I reach my destination, some less severe task-work than falls to the lot of the common convict. It can be done — it is often done — and you can obtain this favour for me by asking for it in a quarter I can mention."

Sir John did not reply immediately, not until he recalled much that had happened of late, and in some way connected it in his mind with what Ray had to tell.

"I promise to do what I can, provided your communication is of the importance you pretend it to be," said Sir John.

"My second communication shall be made before I leave England, provided my first produces the result I hope for. Don't be angry, Sir John. I do not doubt your word, but you may not estimate what I am about to say as I do. I trust to your honour."

Ray then proceeded to narrate all that had occurred at the mill. How that Gilbert came at night to borrow

the large sum of 200 *l.*, bringing with him no other security than Gerard's promise to repay the loan. He did not mention Jasper's name, and he had good reasons for his silence. He then described how, sympathising with Gilbert's distress at not being able to comply with his brother's requirement that the money won should be repaid at once, he had told Gilbert of the money-lender's conditions, and pointed out the possibility of help being obtained from Lady Norwold. How Gilbert went away taking the keys with him to open the outer gate, the time he was absent, and how Ray had met him on his return — exhausted, as he then thought, by his interview with his mother; how he threw the bracelet down, and the words he used when questioned. Ray then assured Sir John that he knew not until the day after his trial that the diamonds had been stolen (he did not say that Jasper had told him this), and that Gerard and not Gilbert had been suspected as the thief — Gerard, the noblest, most self-sacrificing gentleman that ever lived, and who had borne his father's anger rather than breathe a suspicion of his brother's dishonour.

As Ray dwelt on all the incidents of the narrative we have indicated briefly, the violent emotion of Sir John was painfully apparent, but Ray had his own point to gain, and did not pause to consider the effect he was producing on a listener of such a violent and excitable character as the man who sat before him.

As Gilbert's guilt became evident — as Gerard's

innocence came to light, the struggle of the father completely overpowered him.

He started up, clutching at his cravat, and shaking his head to and fro exclaimed, "Let me out! Let me out of this infernal hole, or I shall be suffocated."

The warder heard him instantly, and on opening the cell-door Sir John rushed past him, and as it were by instinct, made his way along the passages until he reached the intervening gates, which he shook in his desire to escape into the air, and then with Higgler passed into the street, where a carriage was awaiting him.

"Come to-morrow — tell them to drive home!" was all he said.

Higgler watched the carriage out of Newgate-street, wondering what could have been the communication which had evidently had such powerful effect upon Sir John. He re-entered the prison, and went to Ray's cell, but the prisoner would tell him nothing, not one word of what had passed. Ray saw the effect he had produced, and did not wish to have it weakened by any interference of Mr. Higgler.

Ray did not deceive himself into the hope that his sentence would be revoked — he knew that was impossible, but he tried to recall all the stories which he had heard of criminals who had obtained concessions from the authorities in Van Diemen's Land, and who had by skill and honest-dealing risen to be men of wealth and position in the colony. He thought that the worst he should endure would be the miseries of

the passage out in the transport-ship, trusting that the influence he had secured by the revelation he had made and had to make, would free him from the convict's chain and harassing labours. Why should he not thrive as others had done? He would apply the cleverness he had hitherto used for dishonest pursuits to make himself a reputable position, and so end his days peacefully. If he could obtain the limited freedom accorded to many other convicts he could do this, for he had not been deprived of all his illgotten gains — no! thanks to his forethought — and there would be friends left in England who were bound to befriend him whenever the time arrived for the exercise of their assistance. So he comforted himself with this Alnascar's dream, although he had already unwittingly destroyed the fragile means which were to realise his pleasant anticipations.

When Sir John Norwold's carriage stopped at the West-end hotel, and the footman opened the door to let out his master, he was horror-stricken to see him lying back on the seat, apparently in a deadly stupor. His face was dark red, and one hand still clutched the white cravat, bound, as was then the fashion, tightly round the neck. Sir John was instantly removed into the house, and medical aid procured only in sufficient time to save him from instant death.

Lady Norwold had ventured during her husband's absence to send for her dress-maker, and was busy with silks and laces and other vanities when the carriage drove up to the door. She saw it arrive from

the window, and terrified at the explosion of angry words which she believed would be sure to succeed Sir John's discovery of her pardonable delinquency, hurried her milliner and her goods from the room, herself condescending to carry a basket of no mean dimensions.

Poor lady! She was never to hear that angry voice again! Passion had done its work, aided by remorse, and the living man brought into her chamber was already as powerless for good or evil as the dead. Throughout the night he laid motionless almost, his deep stertorous breathing painful to hear, and it was well for one watcher by his bedside that he did not know whose act it was that had quenched the life of his father, and made him almost a parricide. That knowledge was mercifully spared him, but never throughout his after-life was that death-bed scene forgotten. Before it quite closes we must return for a short time to the Elms.

Jack Spraggatt had evidently found another little skeleton, but he only concealed it for a day or so after his visit to Nurse Bland, and in conformity with his promise to Lucy, he made her a partner in his new possession. Nurse Bland hald told him more of the circumstances connected with the expulsion of Gerard than he himself had done during their short excited interview; and Jack strongly suspected that his poor friend was bearing the consequences of some disgraceful act which his brother had committed. He had mentioned the conclusion at which he had arrived to

the old nurse, and with which she appeared to coincide; but when Jack proposed to make some effort to vindicate Gerard, she peremptorily forbade him taking any action for that purpose, in compliance with the most earnest injunction of his lost friend. Jack was not satisfied with this state of things, nor was Lucy either, and they determined to set off at once to Nurse Bland and discuss the matter over again.

Had Jack known half as much as Jasper Jellifer, he would have gone at once to Sir John, and had justice done to Gerard; but the self-seeking, prudent Jasper could discover no particular gain to himself, but, on the contrary, the prospect of considerable loss by revealing all he knew of Gilbert's transactions with Ray, and therefore he preserved a selfish silence.

It was otherwise with Jack Spraggatt; Gerard's honour was as dear to him as his own, and he believed his friend to be utterly incapable of an unworthy thought. There were many circumstances not amounting to evidence, perhaps, which led Jack to conceive the possibility of Gilbert having been betrayed into the commission of this wrong; he had always been treacherous and cowardly, and Jack could not bring himself to believe that he was doing his duty by his friend without communicating his own suspicions to Sir John Norwold.

A short drive through pleasant country lanes soon brought Jack and his sister to Mrs. Bland's cottage. Its small garden was crowded with bright blooming flowers and rose-bushes, among whose bells and leaves

the honey-bees were busy from morn till night. The greenest of ivy grew midway up the cottage front, leaving its red tiles in no unpleasant contrast, as they were pierced with latticed windows, draped within by the whitest of dimity. As no cottage is perfect without a porch, this had one; and there Nurse Bland would sit on sunny days to knit or sew, and exchange gossip with a passing neighbour. The settle was unoccupied when Jack and Lucy stopped at the gate. The parlour and upper blinds were down, and no one came for some minutes in answer to Jack's lusty summons, although more than one of the inmates of the neighbouring cottages ran out to learn the cause of the knocking and shouting. At last the door was slowly opened by a purblind old man as deaf as he was blind, and from him Jack contrived to learn that Mrs. Bland was away from home, and he was left to take care of the house. He could tell no more, but he rather thought "that Master Piggott, at the shop, knowed more about 'um." And so to Master Piggott they went.

He did know a great deal that surprised Jack, for he had never thought for a moment that Mrs. Bland at her time of life, and after having lived some fourteen years in her little cottage, could have invested Master Piggott, or any one else, with authority to let the house and sell by auction all her goods and chattels, save and except certain articles which she had distinguished by a chalk cross, and which were to be removed before the day of sale.

"They were matters of small value," Mr. Piggott said; "being two or three portraits of children, and such like, together with an old clock, which he believed had come from the nursery at Norwold Hall."

This news was a great disappointment to Jack and his sister, and set them wondering more and more, whether it was not their duty to see Sir John without loss of time; for it was evident that Gerard was either dead or had resolved to carry out his determination to return home no more. In the first case Mrs. Bland had evidently left a neighbourhood which had, now, such painful associations; in the next, she might have resolved to share Gerard's fortunes, for all knew that she had the love of a mother for her fosterchild.

They had just reached the Elms, when the sound of the horn announcing the approach of the "London up," decided Jack; so buttoning his great coat and giving the reins to Lucy, he exchanged his seat in his gig for one on the outside of the coach, and in due time arrived safely in London as the clock of the inn-yard struck nine.

A hasty toilet and a substantial breakfast having been accomplished, Jack set out for the West-end hotel where Sir John Norwold was lying unconscious of all around him. Whilst his name was being taken up-stairs, Jack heard with much concern the dangerous condition of the sufferer, and would have left at once had not Lady Norwold expressed a desire to see him. She had some vague idea that he had come from

Gerard, and had thought it right that the outcast should know the state to which his father had been reduced. Gilbert, also, connected the coming of Jack Spraggatt with his injured brother, and walked to the window when the young farmer entered the room.

The usual civilities were hardly exchanged when the nurse came from the adjoining chamber to announce that her patient had suddenly rallied, and, as she thought, had muttered the name of Lady Norwold. Her ladyship immediately followed the nurse into the bedchamber, leaving Jack and Gilbert together. Gilbert felt he was bound to say something, and therefore remarked —

"This is a sad state in which you find Sir John, Mr. Spraggatt."

"Yes, sir," replied Jack; "and by me quite unexpected. He looked so hale and hearty that one might have taken a lease of his life for years. I wished to have seen him very much — very much indeed!"

Gilbert made two or three efforts to speak before he could even say — "On business, I presume?"

"Oh, yes, sir — on *his* business principally," answered Jack. "He was always a just man when — not in a passion; and he — —" but recollecting to whom he was speaking, he paused; and then added — "But it is too late, I fear, to — too late!"

The silence which ensued was broken by the entrance of the nurse.

"Sir John has certainly rallied wonderfully," she

said. "He evidently recognises her ladyship, and tries to tell her so. You can see him, if you stand here."

Jack accepted the invitation of the nurse, and looking through the half-opened door, he saw the father of his injured friend, propped up with pillows; his lips twitching slightly now and then, whilst his glazed eyes were fixed on those of Lady Norwold, who sat by the bedside holding his hand. He was dying, no doubt of that, and the last feeble rays of life just lighted up his face.

The nurse was called into the room, and instantly returned to request Mr. Gilbert to go to his father, as her ladyship fancied Sir John had asked for him.

The eyes of the dying man had wandered to and fro whilst these communications had been made, and when Gilbert went to his father's bedside they became fixed upon him. As soon as the confused mind of Sir John could comprehend the presence of his son, a redder flush suffused his face, his eyes dilated, and his breast heaved slowly, slowly, and then with a deep sighing the spirit passed away.

Two men who looked upon that bed of death and saw the dart strike home, remembered it in after years, one to find only remorse in the retrospect, the other to add another comfort to a happy life.

As Mr. Higgler had nothing now to gain through the agency of Ray, he paid no more visits to the convict, and that person, therefore, being dead in the eye of the law, might have been actually defunct for

what anyone not interested in his safe keeping seemed to care for him, and he left England unconscious of Sir John's death, attributing the neglect which he experienced to the want of honour on the part of the baronet, and to the callous selfishness of Higgler, who, having been paid for his share of the business, cared nothing for the poor tool with which he had worked. So, using a bad man's logic, he reasoned himself into the belief that he was an ill-used person, and resolved, if fortune gave him the chance, to revenge himself in the new world to which he was going. We shall meet with him again in after years, and learn how he prospered, and how he did a good turn when it was least expected.

Jasper Jellifer came into possession of all the late miller's property, Jack Spraggatt's wheat amongst other valuables, and it was calculated by those who took the trouble to mind other people's business as well as their own, that Jasper had made a very good bargain, although the money he had received might have been a little cleaner. Jasper always had been a lucky man, everybody said, and by adding and adding honest earnings to the gold he had picked out of the dirt, his gains became so mixed, and grew so bright by being jingled together in the same bag, that there was no one in Morden who could tell one coin from the other, and therefore they came to respect lucky Jasper for a great deal more than he was worth.

CHAPTER X.

Lucy Spraggatt finds a New Lover, and rejects him.

TWELVE months had passed since the death of Sir John Norwold, and it was well for Jack Spraggatt that his tangled affairs had given him constant employment to get them straight, or he might have thought more of the loss of his dear friend Gerard, and of the injustice he had suffered, than would have been good for his peace of mind; but he and Lucy had to exert themselves to the uttermost to surmount the difficulties which surrounded them. Jack needed all his sister's hopefulness and bravery to keep him now and then from desponding, as he would sometimes talk of giving in; but she always discovered some earnest way of going to work, and Jack only wanted such a prompter to play out the part which had fallen to his lot. Their mother had died in ignorance of her children's struggles, and many retrenchments which could not have been made in her lifetime without exciting her inquiries became possible, and were made cheerfully. The accounts of the continued success of Jack's friend in New South Wales were every now and then arriving, and would set him thinking of a new home in that distant land; but then, his household gods had been set up so many years at the Elms that it seemed like

sacrilege to abandon them for other lares, however advantageous the change might seem. His father's fathers had tilled the land around him, and their graves, and those of others whom he had loved, were in the neighbouring churchyard; and, foolish as it may seem, he thought that he could not put the seas between him and them. They were only mounds of earth to the passers-by, but to him they were green shrines where he had often stood and prayed that he might not bring dishonour on their honest names. A foolish fancy, perhaps, but all his life he had seen the seed which he had buried in the earth spring up into flowers and golden grain, and so he could gather loving thoughts from the graves of his departed kindred. Lucy, too, had to be considered, and where could she be as happy as in the old house at home. She would marry some day, no doubt selecting a farmer for her husband, and then the Elms could be managed between them, for without Lucy the place would be home to Jack no longer. The gossip of the neighbourhood had already found her a match in the son of Mr. Hayes, whose farm adjoined their own. The old man was reputed to be rich, and his eldest son Robert would doubtless possess all, as the younger was, although not eighteen, a sot and an idle fellow. True, Robert was not exactly the man Lucy was likely to fancy, as he was given to low sports, and had been known to have visited more than one prizefight. Such amusements were, however, countenanced by the highest in the land, and might be abandoned if he

became amenable to a better influence. Indeed, Robert Hayes had said to more than one confidential friend, that for Lucy Spraggatt's sake he would do anything in the wide world. He had never made any advances to Lucy, for, like most men of low pleasures, he was abashed in the presence of a modest girl, and it was long after his admiration for Miss Spraggatt was known to most of his intimates that he plucked up courage to speak to her brother on the subject.

Jack told him very frankly the objections he saw to the chance of Lucy accepting him for a lover, but Robert Hayes was ready to make oath there and then, that all which was objectionable should be amended, for the happiness of his life depended on her decision in his favour. Jack thought over the matter for a day or two, and generously put forward all the good qualities of the would-be suitor. He was industrious, steady, moderately good looking, and very well to do in the world. His faults were only those of a not over educated young man. There appeared, therefore, no reason why he should not make the venture, and it would rest with Lucy to refuse or accept his proposal. Accordingly Jack brought Robert Hayes home to dinner, and acting as a good brother ought to do, tried to display his sister to the best advantage by exhibiting her household qualifications, and then to present her admirer at his best by directing the conversation into channels adapted to the flow of his ideas. Mr. Hayes floundered about considerably at first, and made a very indifferent dinner, appearing to have much

difficulty in swallowing, even when taking a custard. The home-brewed of the Elms had a local reputation for excellence, and Mr. Hayes seemed inclined to draw his inspirations from the contents of a brown jug, with a silver rim.

Jack at last hit upon a subject on which he knew Mr. Hayes could talk, and his inquiry as to the pedigree of Ponto, Robert's favourite pointer, unloosed the young gentleman's tongue, and set his eloquence flowing.

"He's of the best strain in the country, Miss Spraggatt, if not in all England," said Mr. Hayes. "His great-great-grandsire came direct from Spain, and he has as good blood in his veins as the King of England."

"Not a very loyal comparison, Mr. Hayes," remarked Lucy, not knowing what else to say.

"I beg pardon, Miss, but I think it is. That dog never makes a fault. If the ground's as dry as a biscuit he never once runs over his game; and I'd be bound if he made a point, and the game didn't rise or run, he'd stand for a week — ay, until he was starved to death. Why, last season" — and Mr. Hayes shot over again days upon days wherein Ponto had distinguished himself so greatly, that, according to his admiring master's appreciation of his merits, he deserved to be chiseled in stone and set up in the market-place.

Jack mounted him next upon a favourite mare, and the excited orator rode his hobby for nearly half

an hour, leaving Lucy much opportunity to reflect upon the acquirements and other recommendations of the speaker, although she did not anticipate to what end all this display was directed.

Lucy was country bred, and had an interest — a modified interest — in good dogs and horses, and in all, indeed, that pertained to the true sports of the field; but a young man whose knowledge and tastes appeared to have no further range than the stable and the dog kennel, did not excite in her gentle bosom the amount of admiration necessary to make a proposal of marriage acceptable. Jack Spraggatt perceived the ill success of the aspiring wooer, and after a short absence from the room was, therefore, not surprised to find Mr. Hayes looking the picture of despair at having had his hand and heart respectfully declined by Miss Spraggatt, who had very considerately retired to her own chamber after inflicting this necessary pain on her brother's visitor.

Jack having good-naturedly walked home with the unhappy Strephon, received a sisterly wigging on his return, for having been a party to such an absurd and embarrassing proceeding.

"And now, my dear Jack," said Lucy, "a word or two as to the future. Should any other young gentleman make such a proposal to you again — it is not very likely, I own, but still it is within the range of possibility — I beg you to say that I have neither the wish nor the intention to marry. My course — our course of duty — is clearly defined. We have to get

out of debt, in the first place, and in the next we have to provide for the future. This will be my home so long as I can be useful in it, dear Jack, to you, and when you find another mistress to your liking, I will trust to your generosity to provide for me, for I shall never marry. There, that is what I want you to remember; and that you may not forget it there is a beautiful kiss, one for each cheek, and I wish you a very good night, you bungling, dear old match-maker."

Jack was very glad that Lucy had rejected Robert Hayes. When he saw them sitting in the same room — when he heard him talking so rapturously about dogs and horses and nothing else, he felt that even Letty's French husband was a very desirable connection by comparison.

And yet he did not admire Lucy's parting words — "I shall never marry." Why not? No young girl of twenty makes such a declaration as that and means it, unless her young love has been stolen or given away unworthily. Jack puzzled over this riddle for more than four years, and then never guessed it. He only knew it when the solution was told to him.

The knowledge of Lucy Spraggatt's refusal of Robert Hayes soon became public property by the liberal confidence of the rejected suitor, and nearly everybody blamed the young lady for her folly in not accepting such an eligible offer; the more especially as old Hayes died shortly afterwards, and left Robert his son several thousands of pounds. Morden had its

scandalisers, and some said the Spraggatts had always been thought a little too proud owing to their London connections, and Jack's intimacy with Gerard Norwold, who had turned out such a bad fellow; and though no one could remember any exhibition of this objectionable quality, so far as themselves were concerned, yet they all had heard somebody else say so, and therefore it must be true. Where there was smoke there was sure to be flame. Stupid old adage.

However, the nine days' wonder soon passed away, and there was another subject of popular discussion which retained its interest for a much longer period of time. It was another windfall for lucky Jasper Jellifer. Old Hayes had appointed him the guardian of his younger son William, with an allowance of £150 a-year until the lad should be of age, when he would come into possession of £2000, left to him by his maternal grandfather. What perplexed every one was the reason that Mr. Hayes had selected Jasper for such a trust; but the old man had been a frequent visitor to the shop in the market-place, and as his son's "goings on" had been usually uppermost in his mind, Jellifer had been favoured with a knowledge of the case, and gave such excellent advice as to what he would do with so rebellious a subject, that old Mr. Hayes walked one day direct to his lawyer's, and added a codicil to his will, appointing Jasper guardian to his son. Young William objected strongly at first to this disposition of his person; but as he was a great trouble at home, his brother and his father's executors

insisted on submission, and he was therefore domiciled with the lucky Jasper. Not that there was much to be made out of the £150 a-year, but there were possible contingencies to arise hereafter, quite unseen and unthought of by every one except by clever Jasper Jellifer.

We must be of those, kind reader, with whom "time gallops withal," and pass over another year until the time when Gerard Norwold would (if living) have been twenty-three years old, and, in accordance with the custom of the Norwold family, have attained his majority. That day had been often spoken of by the dwellers in Morden and at Norwold Hall as one when there was to be great merrymakings, as there had been in other days, and from time out of mind. But there was a cloud over the great House, and those who remembered the day as an anniversary of the birth of its heir, shrugged their shoulders, or spoke sadly or disparagingly of the departed Gerard. In one household, however, he was remembered as his kindly, generous nature entitled him to be regarded, and with a strange combination of joy and sorrow. Jack Spraggatt would not believe that he was dead, although the closest inquiries had failed to discover the slightest trace of him after he had quitted the cottage of his old nurse, who had also gone none knew whither. That circumstance gave the Spraggatts and other of Gerard's friends hope that the evidence found on the bank of the river was a device to deceive those who might be interested in his fate, and Jack declared a

determination, for his own part, to keep Gerard's birthday as though he were with them in the flesh. He would have the church bells rung, and give a bullock to be roasted, and have a meeting of all the Norwold tenants at the principal Inn in the market place, and defy the family anger. Lucy, however, dissuaded him from all this. She, too, could not bring herself to believe that their dear friend had played such a cowardly part as to free himself from the sorrows of the present by breaking God's canon against self-murder. Nevertheless, there was no proof that he was living, and such rejoicings would have been a mockery of the dead, provided he was dead. Again, she urged, such a display of friendly rejoicing could not be desired by Gerard, or he would have taken means to have communicated his present condition to some relative or friend. No — he had vowed in the paroxysm of his grief never to claim kindred with his father's house, and though those words were uttered rashly, Lucy believed that they would bind Gerard to their fulfilment unto his dying hour. Jack yielded to the reasoning of his sister, and they resolved to observe the day as they did the anniversaries of the deaths of their father and mother, not sorrowfully, but resignedly and in the belief that the grave was but the portal to a world where love would be eternal. So Gerard was lovingly remembered on that day, and as he was for many long years to come.

Again and once again we must turn over the hour-glass of time, and end for some years our visits to the

Elms, as that once happy home-circle was destined to be broken, and by his hands who had made it such a pleasant abiding-place for so long. Jack Spraggatt, Jack Spraggatt! the bark you are about to steer over thousands of miles of the great sea will be freighted with the whole happiness of your loving sister's life, and woe to your own if you make shipwreck of your venture.

The morrow would be Gilbert Norwold's birth-day, when he would be twenty-three, and the possessor of all the wealth his mistaken father could bequeath to him. There was to be some show of rejoicing at the Hall, but as neither Lady Norwold nor the young heir had made themselves many new friends since Sir John's death, and had kept but little intercourse with their old ones, the day did not promise to have much hearty enjoyment in store for those who were to take part in the festivities.

We shall have to accompany Jasper Jellifer to the Hall in our next chapter, and therefore for the present we will linger at the Elms. The more especially as Lucy has to meet a new wooer, one who will press her earnestly for her love, although he has a place in her heart already. Will she refuse him as she did Robert Hayes? Perhaps not, as her suitor now is — her brother Jack.

The postman had brought a letter to the Elms — a full-bodied responsible-looking letter, and the post-mark was New South Wales. Jack had but one friend in that distant land he knew, and therefore he did not

puzzle himself much to divine the sender, although the handwriting of the superscription was unknown to him. When he opened it and read on, the caligraphy became quite familiar to him, and he was obliged to pause more than once or twice, indeed many times, before he could finish that long, long letter. There was much on those sheets of paper which told of great suffering and hard struggles, ending in successful mastery of difficulties, and a future of promising prosperity. For such revelations Jack was not unprepared when he knew who was the writer, but of that which came after he had never dreamed in all the times when he had thought of the after-fortunes of his sister Lucy, and he was fairly puzzled how to proceed.

Two years had passed since Mr. Hayes had received his credentials as suitor for the hand of Lucy, but the words she had then spoken had come back to her brother's mind again and again: "I shall never marry." How those words had perplexed him at the time they were uttered we have already chronicled, and he was not wiser now as to their meaning. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to take counsel with Lucy herself after he had read the greater part of his long letter again, and so when they were seated by a bright fire early in the evening, Jack produced his budget.

"I have received," he said, "a long letter from an old friend this morning from New South Wales."

"Oh, yes — our old playmate!" she answered. "I trust that he is well and prospering as usual."

"Yes, dear, our friend is prospering bravely, after many difficulties and many trials."

Jack then read from his letter much that we shall know if we wait for the end, and then he came to a part which concerned Lucy more nearly than any letter she had heard read in all her happy life. The writer said: —

"And now, my dear friend, my head fails me — my heart almost fails me when I need them both more than ever I have done since I could think or feel. I have told you all that I can remember of my sufferings and trials and of my present prosperity. I ought, I fear, to make an end, but I can see before me two futures; one a life of ungratifying toil, another of honest exertion rewarded by the peace of home, and the happiness of an assured love. Should I hesitate in an endeavour to secure the happiest because I may be subjected to more pain, more regrets than I have yet endured? Would it not be cowardly to do so? Believing that I hear you answer 'Yes,' I now make my venture, praying with the whole strength of my soul, that God's blessing will be with my imperfect words.

"There was one I left behind me in the land of my kindred that I believed to be possessed of all womanly virtues, and you believing that also, can understand how nearly my friendship had become love. It needed but what has passed to destroy the only impediment to the stronger development, and the change came. It came, and I despised myself for the miserable

thoughts which had kept my love down, and would have stifled it, had I not known tribulation.

"The more I dwelt upon the excellence I had had so long about my path, and yet had estimated only in part, my own demerits rose so strongly to my mind that I felt the poverty of all that I could ever hope to offer in exchange for the treasure I coveted, and — I despaired.

"As time went on my love grew and grew, until it has come to be too great a burthen to be borne in silence, and I now ask you, dear Jack, dear friend, to lend me help in this great need. I dare not write down what I am, for my faults would outnumber my few virtues. You must recall all your old friendship thought me to be, and tell it to her as truth, which coming from your lips she will believe.

"I dare not ask you to send away the light of your home, dear Jack — to send to this distant land the dearest treasure of your great brotherly heart, unless — what a momentous condition! — unless you find — how dare I write? I will be bold in despair, and say, unless Lucy loves me — loves me well enough to leave all — even you, her happy home, old friends, old memories — and trust her future life to my care in this distant land. To come to me and make my life as happy as she has made yours."

The letter contained many more passionate words, which were only intended to be known to Jack and Lucy, and would be read as foolishness by those whose hearts were not concerned in the perusal. It was

signed George Warner, and the hand had trembled as it traced the letters which composed the name.

When Jack had finished reading, Lucy knelt down at his knees, and taking his hand in hers, pressed it to her lips. Her touch was as cold as death. "Dear brother," she said, "what you have read to-night must never be read to me again. I have already told you — I told you what I had determined upon as my course of duty, and that — and that I should never marry."

"Ah, but that was Robert Hayes."

"Do not interrupt me, please, dear Jack, until I have ended. You must not read that letter to me any more, nor must you ever speak to me again about it. I am but a weak woman — with a woman's nature, and such words and thoughts as you have read may affect my peace and make my life a sorrow. Two have passed away out of this house, and whose love watched over us to increase our joys and lessen our sorrows. We two are left alone, dear Jack, and thank God we are not divided by distance or death. If it be decreed that we should part, it must be by the hand which directs all things, my dear, dear, brother."

"I think I understand you Lucy," said Jack, "my heart would be a stone did I not understand you, and refuse the sacrifice you are making for my sake. I never until to-day suspected even that — that he loved you, nor did you I am certain. I never knew until this night that you loved him."

"No! no!" cried Lucy, "I have said nothing to make you infer that."

"Nothing plainly, I grant," said Jack, "but do you think that I am blind, Lucy. That I cannot see all the love in your heart. As I look in your face, now pale as snow, now red as fire. If you have hidden this love, you have acted womanly — wisely, because it might have been unprized and unasked for. But now you know how it is sought and valued, it is your brother's duty to see that you do not wrong yourself."

"I never loved him, Jack; never, had a warmer feeling than —"

"Was proper and right. I know that," interrupted Jack. "Dear Lucy, do not trifle with your love, do not believe that you can ever stifle it in your heart, or that time or anything else can entirely conquer it. No, darling, no. You think it overcome, you think it dead, you fancy it will be forgotten; but some trifling thing, a flower, a song, a word, a well-known place, and back it comes again as strong as ever."

"You only say what you have read or fancied," said Lucy, coldly. "You must have felt love to know what it really is, I have heard say."

"And I have felt it, Lucy — feel it now," replied Jack. "Would that it were not so. No man loved more truly, more fondly than I loved one; — you remember, — I think she would not have rejected me, and, if I had spoken, I might have found a loving answer. I did, I do love her, though it is almost guilt to do so now. I do not blame her. She must have

thought me vacillating, cold, insensible, to have avoided her as I did, and I was glad, yes, I was glad for a time when she married, because I fancied no thought of me, nothing which I had said or done, had touched her heart and could ever make her unhappy."

"Why did you neglect her? Why did you, knowing your own feelings, lead her to believe that she was indifferent to you?" asked Lucy, with much excitement in her face and manner.

"Because my father died, and I saw the change, the struggle that was before me. I knew that I had debts to pay, difficulties to overcome, for the sake of those who had a prior claim upon my love and my exertions."

"And shall I not remember the lesson you have taught me, dear, dear brother," cried Lucy, throwing her arms around his neck. "Shall I forget for any selfish love that dear old Jack has bruised his honest heart to do his duty; that he has waking nights that might bring desponding days, if there were not one to see his sorrow and use her best skill to cure it. Leave you! No, not to be queen of the world!"

"That's —— nonsense!" (Yes, he did! It was very wrong, but knowing what Jack meant, the recording angel took no more count of it than of Uncle Toby's oath.) "My difficulties are nothing now, my creditors are nearly paid, my prospects for the future are brighter, and my spirits and my self-reliance are now equal to anything."

"It is no use, my dear Jack, trying to dissolve our partnership," said Lucy, smiling. "We have still *our* difficulties, *our* creditors, and *our* prospects. You may have a very high opinion of your clever friend abroad, and his log house and his bush-farming, but I am quite contented with my stupid scheming brother, the dear old Elms and a tabby cat. So, go pull off your boots, put on your slippers, and get your pipe, whilst I brew you such a glass of gin-punch as will make you ashamed of this shabby attempt to get rid of your housekeeper."

Jack felt himself out-generaled, and therefore he obeyed the commands of his conqueror, glad that the terms of capitulation were so agreeable. He might have been required to have dried up Lucy's tears, or to have fumigated her out of hysterics. Lucy exerted herself to prevent the conversation turning into the forbidden channel, but Jack was evidently crest-fallen at his defeat, or scheming how he could resume the offensive. Lucy, perhaps, suspected as much, and when the old clock growled as it was wont, before striking ten (or any other hour), she gave Jack his goodnight kiss and prepared to leave the room.

"Just one question," said Jack. "You are positively determined never to marry?"

"Positively, dear boy — I — will — never — marry. Good night."

"Good night," said Jack, as Lucy left the room. "You never — will — marry," imitating Lucy's manner. "Very well. Now hear me, ye old beams and

rafters that for so many years have covered the heads of the Spraggatts, by the last sip of punch remaining in this old tumbler, I will make her marry; and more, I'll make her marry the man of my choice."

The gin-punch had been more potent than usual, perhaps, but that tyrannical brother repeated his terrible threat as he put on his nightcap preparatory to getting into bed.

CHAPTER XI.

Gilbert attains his Majority. — There are Strange Merry-Makings at Norwold Hall.

THE festivities at the Hall on the morrow were to be very limited, merely extending to a dinner-party of some of the neighbouring gentry, and a few additions to the servants' table. The snow which began to fall promised from the appearance of the clouds to continue throughout the night, and would necessarily make travelling disagreeable and difficult, and the unconsidered inhabitants of Morden prognosticated a limited attendance at the old Hall, wherein great merry-makings had been held in olden times. Jasper Jellifer had obtained from the executors of Sir John the much-coveted collectorship, and now became nervously anxious as to his possible retention of the office under the new reign about to commence on the morrow, the more so as a smart London gentleman, who had been located for some days at one of the inns in the market place, had paid two or three visits to the Hall, besides making a great many impertinent inquiries concerning the tenements and various properties on the Norwold estate. Jasper, we know, was a shrewd man, and he came to believe that the smart London gentleman might possibly be preparing himself to supplant him in the position he had occupied during the past three

years. This notion had no sooner possessed him than he set about devising measures for his own security, and early in the morning Jasper Jellifer trudged through the deep snow to Norwold Hall. The family had been early astir, and therefore he found easy access to Mr. Gilbert Norwold, who, having had breakfast, was sitting in the library conversing with his mother through an open door which led into the little room where Jasper had had his former interview with her ladyship. Gilbert Norwold had not passed unscathed through the fiery furnace which he had kindled with his own hands, for time had brought no repentance, and he had sought in a freer indulgence in his old vices, forgetfulness of the past. He succeeded often in hushing the still small voice that will be heard at most unwelcome seasons, and amid the most unlikely scenes for the intrusion of such a monitor, and the consciousness that this appeal might be heard when least expected, made him more reckless in his pleasures, and impatient of restraint in his pursuit of them. He inherited somewhat of his father's irritability of temper, and his own unquiet mind rendered him petulant, dogged, or morose, as circumstances affected him, and therefore his society was as little courted in the world as it had been when he was at college. He was sensible of his unpopularity, and at times the knowledge stung and mortified him into such retaliation as his selfish and cunning nature enabled him to inflict, and had he been as needy as he was revengeful, he would have been a desperate man to his own

cost as well as to that of others. All this was known to Jasper, who nevertheless sought the present interview with less trepidation or misgiving of success than he had experienced when he first asked for the appointment which he was about to solicit again.

"Well, Mr. Jellifer," said Mr. Norwold, "what brings you here so early?"

"In the first place, Mr. Norwold," replied Jasper, smiling his best, "I will venture to offer you my heartiest congratulations on this auspicious day, and to wish —"

"Thank you. Some other business I conclude brought you here?" asked Gilbert, curtly.

Jasper bowed, and smiled again as he said, "Certainly, sir, or I should not have dared to have intruded upon you. For nearly four years, sir, I have had the honour to collect the rents of certain properties in Morden, and to the satisfaction, I believe, of your late excellent father's executors and your trustees."

"I have heard nothing to the contrary," said Gilbert.

"I therefore have ventured to hope that now that the property has passed into your own hands, I may be permitted to retain the collection of the rents."

"You are a sharp man of business, Mr. Jellifer, a very sharp man of business, as I have reason to remember; but early as your application is made, another has been before you," replied Gilbert.

Jasper was not so much startled or disturbed by this announcement as might have been supposed.

"But though the application has been made," said Jasper, "I presume it has not been granted."

"Why do you presume so?" replied Gilbert, sharply.

"Because," and Jasper spoke in a low tone, glancing at the open door as he did so; "because I cannot believe that you would have quite forgotten the small services I have rendered you when they were so much required."

Gilbert rose and closed the open door before he replied.

"For those services, Mr. Jellifer, you were liberally paid. To what they led you no doubt remember, and it is partly because you do so, and partly because I require assistance now, that I contemplate making my London agent the receiver also of my country properties."

"You only contemplate, then," said Jasper. "You have not decided. I am glad of that, because I think you will find me equally useful in all ways."

"You have profited by success, I see, Mr. Jellifer, and can be pertinacious instead of obsequious, as formerly."

"I can be of use to you, Mr. Gilbert," said Jasper, with a smile; "and will be, if you will allow me."

"As you are persistent I must be positive," replied Gilbert. "I decline to continue you as my agent. I am afraid of you."

"You need not be," said Jasper, with perfect coolness, "if you use me fairly."

"Fairly, sir!" replied Gilbert, reddening with anger. "Use you fairly! I have always done so, and shall hear no more." He again rose and went towards the bell.

"Stay, Mr. Norwold! a very few minutes, and I have finished. The Miller Ray ——"

"The scoundrel! the villain!" cried Gilbert. "How dare you speak of him to me?"

"Because I desire to speak of him to *you*, and to no one else," answered Jasper. "If I leave this room deprived of the appointment I have now enjoyed for four years, I shall depart an injured man to my thinking."

"And what then, fellow?" asked Gilbert, loudly.

"Why, then, I will not answer for myself. Injured men brood over their wrongs; and I might do so over mine. I might be led to speak of what I would not utter even within this room."

"What can you say that I should care the world to hear?" asked Gilbert. "That to pay some youthful follies I was fool enough to apply to you; that you introduced me to your friend, the scoundrel Ray, and that I had to obtain from my mother the loan of a bracelet, which the villain sold, or pawned, or made away past recovery. You have been paid the sum I borrowed under that mysterious bond of yours. It was lucky for you, I fancy, that a closer inquiry was not made into that transaction ——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Norwold, that would not be my story," answered Jasper, his lips livid with suppressed anger.

"No! what then, Mr. Jellifer?" asked Gilbert, speaking loudly as he had done during the latter part of this interview.

"I should say, sir, that wanting this money most pressingly you had come to me, who was too poor to help you, that you then sought the assistance of the stranger Ray, who mistrusting your ability to pay, demanded security. That by the aid of false keys you entered your father's house, that you returned with a bracelet, how obtained your dead father has declared, that one of a bunch of keys given you by Ray fitted your mother's cabinet, for the officer Higgler found the keys after a long search in your father's park, and at my suggestion. That you stood by and heard your brother accused of a theft which you could have disproved, and did not. This I might say, Mr. Norwold, under the remembrance of injuries, but which I will carry with me to the grave, if I am fairly used by you. Pray, sir, consider if I cannot serve you. Money if you need; secrecy if you desire it."

During the culmination of this speech Gilbert's hand sought something in the drawer of the table at which he sat. At the conclusion, when Jasper's voice and manner changed to their usual subserviency, Gilbert hurled behind him some heavy substance, and which the other did not affect to observe. Dreadful thoughts had passed through the mind of Gilbert Nor-

wold; and many minutes were required to chase them away completely, as he walked to and fro without regarding Jasper Jellifer.

As soon as Gilbert could obtain sufficient command over himself to allow him to speak, he turned abruptly upon Jasper, and said —

"Who told you that disgraceful story? Was it Ray? It was that cold-blooded villain! Or were you a party to the whole scheme, Mr. Jellifer?"

Jasper protested that it was not until after Ray's conviction that he had been made acquainted with the circumstance, and when he had vainly urged the miller to disclose to whom the bracelet had been consigned.

Gilbert paused again for some moments, still pacing the room as though he were taking time to enable him to make his next inquiry.

"Did Ray — did Ray communicate this story — to my — to any one beside yourself, Mr. Jellifer?"

Jasper saw that the arrow which he had shot had struck over the barb, and was fixed for ever, and so he answered —

"You mean to Sir John? No, sir." That was a lie, and Jasper knew it to be so.

Gilbert paused in his walk, and beckoning Jasper to him, pointed to a small pistol lying upon the ground. "You see that instrument of death, Mr. Jellifer, you might have seen me cast it away some minutes ago. Can you guess why I took it from my drawer?"

Jasper fixed his eyes full upon Gilbert's, and said

quite calmly, "Perhaps with the intention of destroying me, the sole depository of your secret."

"No," said Gilbert, "I am not so mad as that. I have thought again and again that a day might come when some voice, from the grave even, would proclaim the story of my shame and guilt as you have narrated it this day. I thought also, that should such a revelation ever be made I would not live, and that weapon was provided for my own death. I have heard my crime, my shameful crime, described with all its miserable details, and have cast away the instrument of death and dare to live. I have heard how terrible the story sounds from your lips, and will never hear it again if it be possible to buy your silence. You shall have all you ask, more if I have ever the power to grant it. Your interests shall be bound up with my own. I know I cannot touch you nearer, Jasper Jellifer. Let us meet as seldom as possible. Is this agreed between us?"

Jasper was a shrewd man, and saw at once that as his object was gained, he had better close the interview. "The confidence you place in me shall never be abused, Mr. Gilbert, and if I have spoken too plainly I hope you will pardon me. I am a self-seeking man I know, an unforgiving man I grieve to own, and had I left you with a sense of wrong, I know not into what I might have been betrayed. You have trusted me, Mr. Gilbert, and there is no power on earth, no temptation of advantage which can now make me unfaithful to your interests. Good day, sir."

Jasper bowed respectfully, and without waiting to speak to any one, took his way homeward through the snow, which fell so fast that his footsteps were soon obliterated by the stainless flakes, and yet his track round about the house of Norwold could be traced for many years to come.

As Jasper left the room, Gilbert heard a low, rustling noise at the door which led into his mother's apartment, and on opening it he was startled to find her lying in a swoon close beside it.

"She has been listening," Gilbert thought. "What has she heard, I wonder? Enough I fancy to make her regret her meanness." He raised her up, and having placed her in a chair, rang the bell, which was answered by Lady Norwold's maid.

"Your mistress is not well, Jackson," said Gilbert, "I will send the housekeeper to you, and when her ladyship recovers let me know."

He made his way to the billiard-room, where some of the persons staying in the house were amusing themselves; wondering as he went why he had never divulged the truth to his mother, feeling how little he was disturbed now by the supposition that she had listened to the story told by Jasper. He had become less frightened at his sin now that he knew he had a sharer in the guilty secret.

More than an hour elapsed before he was summoned to his mother's apartment. He found her looking very pale, but exhibiting a constrained cheerfulness which he did not care to disturb by any inquiries, and

neither of them referred to the event of the morning but in the most general terms.

The snow still fell fast and continuously, as some of the guests who lived near to the Hall arrived. It needs a warm-hearted friendship to take men and women from comfortable firesides on a rough snowy winter's night, miles away, to meet old familiar faces, and how much more to a formal dinner-party. The Norwolds were not surprised, therefore, that when dinner was announced as served, many of their invited friends were absent. Few trifles have a more depressing influence on an assembly than a dinner-table around which there are vacant chairs, and not even when the expected guests are despaired of, can the best Amphitryon rally the flagging spirits of his party. Lady Norwold seemed incapable of making an effort to overcome the effect produced by the absence of her friends, but looked more like the skeleton at an Egyptian feast than the proud mother of a son attaining his majority. She was still very pale, and every effort she made at conversation seemed painful to her. Her friends attributed her condition to disappointment at the absent, and kindly strove to cover her deficiency as hostess by chatter among themselves. Gilbert, also, was ill at ease, it was evident, but having his feelings more under control, he soon mastered his mortification at what his guilty conscience made him suppose, the intentional slight of his absent guests, rather than a necessity imposed upon them by the weather. And so passed the dinner until the family orator rose to propose the health

of the youthful host, and as he was a man of many words, and set phrases, he repeated those fulsome panegyrics which we were wont to hear after dinner, and still read upon tombstones. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm by those assembled to do honour to the occasion. One only could not pledge the heir perhaps of Norwold, but there she sat with a fixed gaze and livid lips powerless to moisten them with the cool wine in the glass before her. Not even the shouts and clapping of hands which hailed her son a man broke her dreaming, and it was only when tears rushed from her heart into her eyes that she appeared conscious of her place in this, by her, long desired ceremony. None there doubted the cause of her tears and of the succeeding weakness. Was she not Gilbert's widowed mother? Had he not been the idol of her life, to whom she had offered up all the woman's love her heart contained? Was not this day one to be noted and remembered all her life long? Ah! yes, it was never forgotten until all else passed into oblivion with it. It was remembered daily, almost hourly, but in silence. No word recalled its morning or its evening in any after conversation with Gilbert; and when she had learned to pray, taught by her broken hopes and her chastened selfishness, she entreated pardon and blessings for her son.

There was mirth and to spare in the servants' hall, for those good men and women bear complacently enough the sorrows and mortifications of their masters and mistresses. Why should they do otherwise? They

are not paid for their sympathies, and are soon taught "that service is no inheritance." There are exceptions to this teaching. Good servants, who reckon kindly words and actions as matters to be accounted for at the ending of each day, and just masters, who consider the services of an active and devoted youth as debts to be cancelled only by a generous care of a less profitable old age.

It was a Norwold custom to brew a hogshead of strong ale on the birth of a son to the house, and this brewage was not tapped until the infant arrived at his majority. This ceremony had been duly performed by the old butler, and the strong liquor produced in the servants' hall in a veritable black jack, which, it was said, had performed a similar duty when the first knight of Norwold won his spurs. The potency of the liquor was soon declared by the increased clamour which followed the circulation of the black jack, and at last it became necessary to conduct the head keeper (whose once curly poll had grown grey in the service of the house) to his cottage in the park. As he was led by his subordinates beneath the windows of the dining-room, he could not be restrained from giving vent to certain opinions which he entertained, but which, from prudential considerations, he usually kept to himself. The strong ale would be heard to-night, and Gilbert, who had returned alone to the dining-room, opened one of the windows to ascertain the cause of the riot, just as the keeper expressed himself to the following effect: —

"I say Mr. Gilbert bean't a Norwold. Not a bit on't. He don't care a brass farden for shooting, 'unting, or fishing, and he han't got a Norwold heart in 'um, I tell 'ee. Mr. Gerard was another guess sort of chap altogether! He'd a made the old pleace what it wor in his feather's time — that is, when his feather was young and I was a boy! I tell 'ee what, Bill! Mister Gilbert is a bad 'un, and choused his brother as sure as my neam's Joe. I never emptied a horn to-night as I didn't say Mr. Gerard's good health until he cooms back again — and back he'll coom some day as sure as my neam's Joe —" And then the tipsy mutterings of the old keeper were indistinguishable by the listening master, who felt a coldness about his heart that night — colder than the frosty air which had changed the breath of the guests upon the windows into fairy forest trees — as he knew the tipsy man had spoken the truth, and that it would be repeated again and again, until it might be heard to his destruction. His first impulse was to dismiss from his service the ungrateful servant; but the question would be asked by his household, in Morden town, and at the market-table, why was old Joe the keeper sent away from Norwold Hall? and he dared not provoke the answer.

There had been merry-making also in the town of Morden, and the most noisy and the most intoxicated of the revellers was certainly Jasper Jellifer's ward, William Hayes. Jasper had done his duty honourably by the young satyr so long as he could control his conduct — all the neighbours said that. He carefully

regulated his outgoings and incomings, and curbed his passion for drink, limiting his potations. Jasper managed this so adroitly that young Hayes vowed there was not a kinder, better fellow in the world than Mr. Jellifer. But when young Hayes came of age matters changed for the worst, and he was often seen in the mornings with bleared eyes and a flushed face. By-and-by his hands trembled, and rumours were abroad that the doctor had been called in to repair, if possible, the ravages of his debauchery. Young Hayes was seldom seen in the market place, except on his way to one of the inns for his morning's draught, and which was frequently so deep that his steps were unsteady when he returned, although he rarely remained after midday.

At last the doctor was a very frequent visitor at Jasper's house, and then it was announced one day, to the surprise of no one in Morden, that young Hayes was dead — dead from drinking brandy continually.

Jasper's patience had been long worn out, and as he despaired of conquering the young drunkard's love of drink, he had retired from the contest, and yielded up to him the key of the cellar! Poor William Hayes, like Mad Tom, "found ratsbane by his porridge;" for brandy was his poison, and he took it and died.

Jasper had not suspected, he said, the consequences likely to follow his own goodnatured imprudence, and would have taken this calamity greatly to heart, no doubt, had he not found an unexpected consolation. He was always a lucky fellow, and now he reaped the

reward of the care and trouble he had bestowed on his late ward, William Hayes. The grateful drunkard had bequeathed to Jasper Jellifer all that he was worth, and which amounted, according to popular calculation, to nearly twelve hundred pounds. How all Jasper's windfalls fructified, blown down as they were at his feet, we shall see, if we have patience to wait for the end.

CHAPTER XII.

Jack Spraggatt surprises his Neighbours, and sees the last of Norwold Hall.

JACK SPRAGGATT, much to his credit, had been very unmindful of his sister's injunctions, and had frequently pleaded the cause of his absent friend, without, however, appearing to shake Lucy's determination in the least. He had not obtained the slightest admission that the proposal would have been acceptable to her under any circumstances, but fraternal love quickened the brother's perception, and he had satisfied himself that the happiness of Lucy was absolutely dependent upon a course of conduct opposed to that which she had declared her determination to pursue. Jack was an obstinate fellow when he believed himself to be in the right; particularly obstinate when he thought the best interests of others were under his influence, and at last he determined to compel Lucy to accept the only man he had ever thought her capable of loving as a husband. Had he arrived at a correct estimate of his sister's feelings? He was sure of that, as he had found her frequently alone, and when her eyes gave evidence that she had been weeping; and he knew that she had no cause for any other sorrow than that which must have resulted from the struggle which she had so

nobly maintained between her love for the absent and her sense of duty towards her brother. Jack, therefore, resolved upon a course of action which he knew would prove effectual in deciding this painful question, and in order to avoid any controversy with his sister he kept his plans to himself until it was quite beyond her power to controvert them.

He then communicated them to Lucy by affixing to the wall of their breakfast room a placard, headed

THE ELMS,

and whereon was set forth in varied types the startling announcement that Mr. Peter Mallett was instructed by the respected tenant of that very productive and eligible farm to sell by auction the remainder of the lease, together with all the stock, live and dead, farm implements, and household furniture pertaining thereto, without reserve, on the last day of the month following.

Lucy was not quite unprepared for this announcement, as Jack had latterly thrown out vague hints that he had a duty also to perform, and that he would not have the self-reproach of having sacrificed the happiness of his sister to a sentimentality which could be manfully overcome.

"You see, my darling," he said, smiling, "to what extremity you have driven me; and though no loving heart but yours will greet me in the distant land to which we are going together, I shall leave none behind me from whom a separation would be a continual sor-

row. I confess that the first sight of that great bill sent a pang to my heart, but that has passed away, and the few regrets which will remain when I shall look upon this old house for the last time, will be compensated for a thousand fold, by the conviction that the beloved dead would approve an act which will pluck from my sister's life that ever rankling thorn — a love unsatisfied."

Lucy's head was resting on his bosom as he said this, and the look which filled her face when she turned it up towards his, told him that he had read truly the secret of her heart, and that she was as grateful as she was happy.

The little world of Morden was busy enough when the knowledge that the Spraggatts were to be sold up, became general, conjecturing, and inquiring as to the cause for such an unlooked-for event. The more the gossips discussed the subject the more perplexed they became, especially as Jack always appeared to be in the highest spirits, and the best of humours. More than one friend who had stood by the Spraggatts in their recent troubles, were ready to help again if that were needed; but Jack only thanked them from the bottom of his full heart, and assured them that he should be free from debt and have plenty to spare, when all at the Elms had been knocked down to the highest bidders. There were, however, exceptional times when Jack was not so cheerful, and when big sighs and grave looks betrayed the latent pain which comes with a broken home. There are many living

memories associated with household things which make the insensate materials almost as dear as though they had life and feeling, and one could sometimes resent their rough handling, and indifferent estimate by the callous broker, who sees in them only lots to be dispersed according to conditions of sale, leaving behind them a residuum of commission for selling to be paid by the purchaser. Poor Jack had more than one sharp struggle before he would consent to surrender an old chair or table, or piece of ancient crockery that had home legends tacked to it, and some few matters were found to be too sacred to be permitted to pass into strangers' hands, and were crowded away into Jack's little counting-house, to be carried to the new home, wherever that might be, giving infinite trouble, and costing ten times their value in transport by sea and land. They were held to be more precious for their cost, and were worth the money and anxiety, bringing back as they did for years and years, pleasant remembrances of departed loved ones, and of the old house at home.

Lucy shared in all these weaknesses, but knowing for whom this great household sacrifice had been made, she hid her own emotions from Jack, and went about her necessary work bravely, not showing how hard it was to part with so many old familiar things until the morning of the sale, when she prepared to leave the Elms to stay with a neighbour; and then she lingered about the rooms which had echoed to now silent feet, and to her own voice from childhood to that day, until she

thought (but only for a moment), that the future should be indeed a bright one that could compensate for this severance, as it were, from a past so full of remembered happiness. She wept very sadly as she knelt down in the chamber wherein her parents had died, and repeated the simple prayers she had said at her mother's knee, as though she had hoped to hear that mother's voice blessing her again, as it used to do when she laid her down to rest.

Jack saw something of Lucy's sorrow, and avoided her — great, stupid, coward that he was — and went out busying himself in doing nothing particular, until Lucy was driven off in their neighbour's gig. He then went back alone into the house, and looked very red and flustered when he came out again.

The stock, both live and dead, had a good reputation, and the persons who came to purchase were numerous and respectable. There were plenty of idlers, also, for there are many people who flock to a sale, as others do to a funeral, and not always from the most charitable motives. If there were any present who came to rejoice over the dead fortunes of the Spraggatts, they must have been mystified to have seen how Jack bore himself. He cracked jokes with some, descanted to others all the prime qualities of his favourite breeds of sheep and oxen, and exhibited his samples of grain with as much cheeriness as he had ever done at the market-cross, and when prices were rising. He was selling himself off because it pleased him, and so thoroughly enjoyed the fun, that no doubt he could

have mounted the auctioneer's rostrum, in the parlour, or its peripatetic substitute, the wheel-barrow, out of doors, and knocked down his own lots. It was customary, and perhaps, it may be so at present, to feed the competing buyers before the business of the day began, and Jack's guests were numerous and hungry enough. The slices of beef roast and boiled which disappeared were truly marvellous, and the home-brewed ale was neither weak nor sparingly supplied. Many a timid man who had set a very moderate price on some desired lot came forth a resolute buyer, and would not be outbid by any one who dared to compete with him. The bold became more bold, and paid liberally for their entertainment by "springing a little," when good-humouredly taunted by the auctioneer for "their want of speerit."

The small British farmer of other days was a dull fellow enough when met at his plough-tail, or at dung-carting, or in the harvest fields, as dull as the oxen he drove, or the beasts he fattened. He knew nothing of phosphates and sulphates, and all the other great agents of agricultural chemistry, and would as soon have thought of threshing by steam as going up in a balloon to catch larks. He was contented to farm as his feyther had farmed afore him, and only knew that "plenty of muck, plenty of crop." He brightened up greatly on market days, whether he was buyer or seller, and it was difficult to dip your fingers into his leathern money bag more deeply than was conducive to his own interests. He worked hard for his money, and generally knew how

to keep it. But he was brightest at a sale, where he always made up his mind to get a bargain if he could, and approached the object he desired very charily, taking shy looks at it, and never closely examining into its merits so long as a possible competitor was at hand. When he had satisfied himself of the desirable-ness of the commodity, he showed no further interest in it until it came under general notice, and then it was to ascertain if others had as good an opinion of it as himself, and an intention to purchase. If he could say a word of disparagement, he did so, and then mostly retired to the outer circle, where he could catch the eye of the auctioneer without attracting attention to himself. His bids were always made by winks, and when the offers of others had nearly reached the limit of his estimate, he would thrust his hands into his pockets and take a few turns to keep down his rising anxiety. As the seller dwelt upon the last bid, he would return to his station, and wait until the hammer appeared descending finally before he winked again. He would then fix his eyes on the competing adversary, until it was evident that he would rather have pulled off his coat and fought out the difference between them. When fortunate enough to have been the purchaser, he usually gave his name with a blush, as though he were ashamed of his bargain, or had been detected in an act which reflected upon his prudence, and would expose him to the small wit of the market-table. He had bought a bargain, be certain of that, and was no more to be blamed for his caution and cunning than

the dowagers who decry the cracked china which they have commissioned Mr. Moses to buy at any sum.

The Spraggatt sale lasted three days, and the lots fetched excellent prices, but no one, not even Mr. Mallett, the auctioneer, could get at Jack's secret, for selling off; this, he said, still remained "reserved" and was not to appear in the catalogue.

The three or four days immediately succeeding the sale were possibly the most painful Jack Spraggatt had ever known! The cattle and other stock were driven away, and the stalls and sheds left empty. Well that had happened in part often enough before. The farm gear had been subject to change and removal, so let that go! But those empty rooms! Those terrible empty rooms which had been never without some dear face, some old familiar object since he could remember! There were dirty foot-prints and littered straw then over the floor, and the bared walls were stained here and there with the marks of picture, map, or weather-glass! All gone to the homes of strangers, or to the broker's shop in the market place! Jack blinded his eyes with his two closed hands, to shut out the desolation about him; but the visions which he then saw, the phantasmagoria of what had been in those old rooms, were more than he could bear, and he walked out into the garden to the yew hedge, where he had been wont to go when his dark hours were upon him. And then he recalled his old struggles with the dreadful skeleton which he had buried at last, and remembered who had given him courage for the contest, and

that he owed to her all the happiness of his life. Could he have remained indebted to her for so much when, by the sacrifice of so little, he could reverse their positions, and make her the debtor? No! a thousand times no! and there was comfort in the thought.

The last evening that Jack Spraggatt was to pass at the Elms arrived, and closed in darkly and stormily. Lucy had gone to London to stay with some friends preparatory to seeking her new home, and poor Jack might therefore be excused feeling lonely and depressed, in spite of all his philosophy. His thoughts had been occupied with the past more than with the future, and, at last, not being able to endure his solitariness any longer, (it had been his own election that he was alone), he put on a rough coat, and walked towards Morden. The market place was almost deserted, but the lights shone brightly in the shop windows, more dimly perhaps in those of the thriving Jasper Jellifer than in any other, as he had always been economical in oil and candles as in most other things. It was his shop, however, that Jack entered, but he found only Mrs. Jellifer at home, and that worthy lady's surprise was excusable when Jack asked for her husband, as his visits to them had been of rare occurrence at all times. Jellifer, she said, was down at the mill, which he had continued to tenant since Ray's forcible desertion of it, although it was seldom that the old wheel made its pleasant music. It was principally used as a storehouse for some of the larger commodities in which Jasper dealt, and its once pretty garden was now

neglected, and its shrubs and evergreens allowed to to grow wild. Thither Jack Spraggatt took his way, guided in some degree by the patches of unmelted snow which lay in the fields and by the roadside, as the night was dark. When Jack reached the mill, there was a light burning in the room where he and Ray had driven their hard bargain some few years before, and he could see through the uncurtained window that Jasper was engaged with some one within, whose figure, as he stood with his back to the window, was not altogether unknown to him. Without thinking of what he was doing, Jack continued a quiet spectator, and saw that Jasper was paying money, and for which he took no receipt. The man then turned to go, but as his face was partially concealed by the brim of his hat and a large neckerchief which he wore, Jack was no wiser than before as to his identity. The unconscious spy then became sensible of the impropriety he was committing, and being rather ashamed to be detected in such a position, walked to the door as Jasper opened it to let out his visitor. The stranger threw a hurried glance as the light fell upon Jack, but contenting himself with observing, "A dark night, sir," walked away like one well acquainted with the road which led to the town. The voice, the figure, were both known to Spraggatt, but not sufficiently well to be recognised positively, and as Jasper made no reference to his departed friend, Jack, conscious that he already knew more than he ought to have done, was silent on the subject.

"You make your visits late to the mill, Mr. Spraggatt," said Jasper. "The last time I met you here, some years ago, I remember was at the same hour."

"You have a good memory, Mr. Jellifer," replied Jack; "and I remember also, you were in the garden when I came on business with that — man Ray."

"And to-night, have you come on business with me?" inquired Jasper, without asking Jack to sit down, although they had entered the parlour.

"I have, Mr. Jellifer, though you may possibly consider what I am about to say a little impertinent, but as we may not meet again, for some time, I hope you will excuse me."

"Pray sit down, sir," said Jasper, evidently a little confused, and desirous, perhaps, to recover his habitual coolness, adding: "I am sure you will not willingly offend me."

"Certainly not," replied Jack, "no honest man would be offended at what I am about to say; and I am sure you are — you will not be."

Jack should have called Jasper an honest man, but somehow, he could not get the words to his lips.

"You remember, I am sure," continued Jack, "the painful circumstances which occurred at Norwold Hall, some four years ago." Jasper bowed. "You were fortunate to escape loss by what followed so soon after to the unfortunate man who then owned the mill." Jasper bowed again, but more slightly than before. "I have never been able to disconnect those two events with each other," said Jack, "although from the strictest

inquiries which I have made, I have learned nothing to justify me in doing so." Jasper bowed again, but smiling as though he would imply, "he should think not," and Jack paused, before proceeding to say more, as doubting how to put the question, he was desirous to ask, inoffensively. He was not very successful when he did speak.

"It was evident to every one, Mr. Jellifer, that you and Ray had much business together, and trusted each other in many things."

"Mr. Spraggatt," said Jasper, "I must remind you that Ray proved to be a thief, and the associate of thieves — I only knew him as a neighbour, who bore a respectable name, and to whom I foolishly entrusted my hard earnings."

"All which you recovered, Mr. Jellifer," replied Jack, not caring to be hood-winked by Jasper's repudiation of Ray. "You came into possession of all the felon's property, and with that — as I hope — some of his secrets."

"I don't understand you, sir," said Jasper, in an offended tone.

"Pray don't *mis*understand me," replied Jack. "I mean that you saw him more than once after his conviction, and after Higgler — by the bye did he not leave you to-night when I arrived?"

"No, sir," answered Jasper, flatly.

"I am mistaken," continued Jack. "I was about to say, after Higgler had tried in vain to obtain the knowledge that I now seek. You know, or you may

have heard, that Mr. Gerard Norwold honoured me with his friendship." Jack could not proceed for some moments. "I am ashamed of this weakness, but I loved him very dearly, and hold his memory very dearly also. I am about to leave England, perhaps for ever, and since I have taken my resolution to do so, I have thought again and again, that it would be a great satisfaction, to me and to my sister, if by any effort of mine his fair name could be restored to him."

"His family and friends have not been idle to discover the means of doing so. I am sorry to add, without effect," observed Jellifer.

"There is one person, possibly, who could do him justice?" said Jack, fixing his eyes steadfastly on Jellifer.

"What man?" asked Jasper, compressing his lips closely together, as though to restrain any exhibition of anxiety.

"Possibly yourself, Mr. Jellifer," answered Jack; "or if not you, the person who still has possession of the diamond bracelet, which, as there is a heaven, Gerard never had in his possession."

"How do you know that?" asked Jasper, earnestly.

"Because Gerard has said it, and he was too noble for falsehood. The man who holds that bracelet could prove it also, possibly. There might be some slight incident connected with his possession of it, which would cast a clearer light than has been yet thrown on that dark transaction. Are you the man?"

"I am not the man," replied Jasper, with pardonable warmth. "You do me great injury in supposing that I could be the man."

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Jellifer; I ought not to have encouraged such a thought; but as certain papers were found in this room that led to the terrible accusation of my dear friend, and as you became possessed of so much which had been Ray's, I hoped that you might — I mean that for your own security — a pardonable fear of implication —"

"I might have been as bad a man as Raymond Ray. I thank you, sir;" said Jasper, rising. "I have hitherto borne an honest name, Mr. Spraggatt, and thought myself secure from such an insult as you have offered me."

"I cannot recall what I have said, Mr. Jellifer. If I have given you pain I am sorry for it. One question more, and I have done. As you will one day have to answer for all evil done in act or knowledge, I ask you if you know who does possess that bracelet?"

Jack rose up as he spoke, and Jasper recoiled from him, as though he feared some violence; but seeing that his questioner had no such intention, he answered firmly — and truthfully — "I do not know. I cannot even guess who had it."

"Then the mystery must continue unresolved, and a fair name remain dishonoured," said Jack, with great emotion. "It matters nothing to the dead, and little, I fancy, to the living; and so good bye, Mr. Jellifer.

Let us part friends. Life is too short for evil thoughts or evil actions. Good bye, sir."

They shook hands, and Jasper led the way to the door. The night was intensely dark, and as they walked to the garden gate, a sudden light shone for a moment and disappeared.

"Was that lightning?" asked Jellifer.

Before Jack could reply it shone again, but now continuously, and when they turned to find the cause, they saw that Norwold Hall was in flames. The first impulse of both men was to run to the burning house, but Jack Spraggatt went no further than the wicket which led into the park, and from which he could see the flames through the avenue of old trees, which now formed, as it were, a frame to the fiery picture.

"What should I care if every trace of that house wherein such wickedness has been done, should perish in the fire! Let it burn; and may the injuries inflicted within its walls be forgotten and forgiven! Strange! strange! that my last walk to my old home should be by the light of such a torch as Norwold Hall!"

Jack took the road to the Elms, occasionally pausing to look back at the fire, and listen to the clanging of the church bells, as they were rung backwards, the inharmonious noise awakening the early sleepers, and rousing the convivial sitters in the town of Morden. Very soon every man's face was towards the burning Hall, and women and children ran beside them to see

the great house on fire; but Jack Spraggatt turned his back upon the blazing mass which lighted up the heavens, and cast his shadow before him on the pavement of the old High Street, and the path-way beyond it, almost to the porch of the Elms, on the last night he was to call that old house by the name of home!

CHAPTER XIII.

Old Friends in a New World.

"TUM to tea, untle Jack, tum directly, minute," cried a bright-eyed little girl standing in the doorway of a log-house on the borders of the Bathurst country. An old English mastiff, the terror of the native dingoes, lying basking in the sun beneath the verandah which ran round the house, merely wagged his tail in recognition of the speaker, but half rose up when a full manly voice came pealing across the stock-yard in reply, as though the old dog was watching for the coming of his beloved master. None could doubt that the settlers were from England when they saw the neat garden filled with the prettiest flowers of the country, interspersed here and there with a few English exotics, which appeared to be cherished tenderly. The house and out-buildings were all of unsawn timber, and the great stock-yard was surrounded by palisades of a regular height, but only trimmed by the axe. Far away stretched Bathurst Plains, with here and there great growths of forest trees, then brown with their summer foliage. Beautiful birds — but songless, alas! — flew about in the bright sunshine, whilst groups of parrots screamed at each other, hardly compensating by the brilliancy of their appearance for the horrible discord

they created. The interior of the house was as cleanly and as orderly as any true Englishwoman's home is sure to be, and here and there were evidences of a better taste than is always to be found in the rude dwellings of the Bush. Four years ago the sole owner of this location had been George Warner; but he had taken to himself since then two partners, one for life, and the other a sharer in his toil and worldly gains, in the person of his brother-in-law, John Spraggatt. It was he who, in answer to his niece's summons, now came from tending cows, and horses, and bullocks, in the stock-yard, and toward whom the old mastiff bounded the moment he knew his attentions would be acceptable. No one meeting Jack Spraggatt now, in Morden market-place, would have recognised the smart young farmer of former days. His beard had been allowed to grow, and showed a productive harvest. His shirt was of blue flannel, and his breeches of strong drab cloth, fastened round his waist with a leathern strap. His boots were of horse-hide, with the hair preserved on the outer side, and the spurs attached to his heels were odd ones, and none of the brightest. Before entering the house he made his way to an out-building, and there completed a satisfactory toilet by the aid of a tub of water and a clean jack-towel. His hair and beard he arranged by the aid of a mane-comb, which he carried in the pocket of his flannel shirt, and then entered the kitchen where the tea was awaiting him. As soon as he was seated, his little niece Florence mounted his knee, and received a kiss through that

great shaggy beard, which tickled her into laughter. Though Lucy — Mrs. Warner — was present at the table, its honours were performed by an elderly person who had held that position for the eight preceding years, ever since Warner had been in the colony, having come with him, old as she was, from her native England. She was called Nurse, and it was difficult to say who loved her most of that desert family. She did no household work now, but patched and mended when her old eyes would let her, and looked after the idol of the house, Florence, when Lucy was engaged in other domestic duties. Mr. Warner had gone down to the new town of Bathurst on business, and was not expected until late in the evening; so we shall have time to say something of him, and of what he has done since we parted with Gerard Norwold eight years ago, and when we learned that we should never hear of that dishonoured name again except in connection with the past.

George Warner had inherited all the good or evil pertaining to that banished son, and had vowed that his father's home should never more be his, but that in this new land he would raise up a house that should outvie in honour and repute any that could be found in England, although title should be wanting. To achieve this, he did not hesitate to accept the assistance of his mother's friend, his devoted nurse; so together they had come to this distant land, and had made a resting-place which God had blessed, until one poor exile's spirit wandered day and night back to his native

land, and hovered round the dwellers at the Elms, growing bolder and bolder from the blessings which came every day, and at last it wrote down the earnest, passionate words to which Lucy had listened, and which made Jack Spraggatt part from all that bound him to the home of his fathers, so that he might bring two loving hearts together, and make all their lives happy for a time.

Lucy had not come undowered to her husband, and Jack had brought into the partnership not only money, but willing labour, and farming knowledge, and was one of the first in the colony to discover that gold could be really gathered from the backs of sheep, though the breed did not come from Colchis. He had brought with him two of the choicest animals of his herds, and their produce had helped to enrich him beyond his expectations. It was he who had worked about the log-house, and laid out the garden to resemble in some degree the one at the Elms, though there was no yew hedge to bring back the remembrance of past sorrows. But there is to be no more a Paradise upon earth, and occasionally thoughts of the old time and a love of the old land would come back to all and for a while sadden each in turn.

The barking of the dogs announced the return of Warner, and all were glad to see that he was accompanied by a young man, evidently a stranger to the Bush. There was no mistaking the military air of the new-comer, and none were surprised, therefore, to learn that Lieutenant Hammerton was stationed at Bathurst,

and had come over, on leave, to stay a few days at Ararat, as the location was called.

"I have been fortunate enough to discover in this gentleman the one who was so kind to me on my arrival in the colony," said Warner. "Nurse, you recognise our friend in Lieutenant Hammerton."

"Ah, bless me, yes!" replied Nurse; "we have spoken of you a hundred, hundred times."

"I am sure you are very kind to remember such a small service," said the young man. "I assure you, madam," addressing Lucy, "I merely performed the commonest civility to a stranger."

"Not so," answered Warner. "You thought us poor and destitute of friends, and would have supplied both, my good fellow. Let me introduce you to my wife, who will be glad to entertain a civilised gentleman as long as his leisure or inclination will permit him to remain."

Lucy spoke a few earnest words in corroboration of her husband's invitation, and an ample supper was soon prepared. Jack had charged himself with the care of the horses, and having seen them carefully stabled and groomed by one of the men, joined the party. Of course the conversation went to the Old Country, and the young lieutenant did not hesitate to confess that he cared not how soon he returned home again.

"It is all very well for you, Warner, who are employed in making your fortune, to live in this desolate place; but I long, I confess, for the comforts

and elegancies of a more advanced state of civilisation," said Hammerton.

"I can well understand," replied Warner, with a very small sigh, "that you miss much to which you have been so long accustomed that it has become necessary to your enjoyment of life; but we have projected our own future, and are happy and contented to work it out."

"For my part," said Jack, "I would not exchange our free and independent life in the Bush for all the shams of what is called society at home. One feels a sort of king in this new country, and only regrets that it is necessary to slaughter so many of one's subjects annually, even after shearing them."

"I can believe *you*, sir," replied Hammerton; "but when a fellow has nothing but his pay to exist upon, and no prospects of increasing it, I would rather enjoy some of the privileges of my red coat, and take a little out of society."

Hammerton then recalled some of his pleasant experiences, and dined again with hospitable mayors, and danced once more with their pretty daughters, as he had done when his first uniform was untarnished.

Jack Spraggatt would have taken exception to much that Hammerton described as human felicity, but he was too considerate to say anything which might be distasteful to their guest; whilst Lucy was pleased with their young friend's good spirits and grateful remembrance of such small enjoyments as he had described.

"I think you and Mr. Warner are brave people," said Hammerton, quite omitting Jack, "to squat down here, and live as though you had been always used to such hard lives. I know you have not — I see it — and I hope you may never feel your life irksome. By Jove! I don't think any amount of gain would reconcile me to such an exile. I should look at little missee there, sitting on papa's knee, and think what she might be in Old England, and what she must be in this wilderness. There she would have access to all the refinements and accomplishments which make a lady; here she will be obliged to vegetate into the wife of some colonist, like —"

"Me," said Jack, finding Hammerton's eye rest on him as he paused.

"Well, without offence, yes — and a very good husband you would make, no doubt, for a colonist," replied the lieutenant.

Lucy looked at her husband, and saw there was a shade upon his face as he gazed earnestly at little Florence. Perhaps she had seen it there before, as she rose instantly, saying, "Flory must go to bed now, it is long past bed-time; but she was promised to sit up for papa, and promises to little girls must not be broken." So, taking the child in her arms, she held its rosy lips to be kissed by the dreaming father, and to be tickled once more into laughter by Uncle Jack's big beard.

The conversation then turned upon the new discoveries made by Blaxworth, Wentworth, and Lawson,

and the future prospects of the colony, occasionally varied by some of Hammerton's experiences with the convicts, and the remarkable prosperity of some who had worked out their term of servitude, and become men of wealth and character.

The party retired to rest early, and in the morning Jack started before the others had assembled at breakfast to attend to their distant stations, where they had large flocks under the care of hired shepherds, so that Hammerton was left to Warner for entertainment and amusement.

Throughout the two succeeding days their conversation frequently reverted to the Old Country, and Hammerton produced an effect on Warner's mind which for awhile disturbed him, and required the exercise of a strong will to control, if not to subdue, altogether; and it was well, perhaps, that the regiment to which Hammerton was attached was ordered home before much further intercourse took place between them.

The order of recall came very unexpectedly, and would have placed Hammerton and a young ensign in considerable pecuniary difficulty had not Warner proved his sense of the lieutenant's former kindness more substantially than by words. The time came when Warner was strangely reminded of this parting.

Lucy, with the eyes of love, had seen what was often present in her husband's mind, and, as Florence grew older, sought diligently to impart to her as much knowledge as she herself possessed; but the child was self-willed, and being petted by every one, was in-

duced only with great difficulty to apply herself to her studies. Her chief delight being in music, Uncle Jack, by the aid of his fiddle, made her acquainted with the rudiments of that delightful science, and then by degrees she learned to sing from notes, and added greatly to the few amusements of the home in the Bush.

Lucy met with an unexpected adversary to her watchful care and endeavours to ensure contentment to her husband, in no less a person than old Nurse. As she increased in years, her mind became enfeebled, and, like most old persons, she would wander back into the past, and dwell upon the remembrances of her youth. She was never happier than when so employed, narrating to Florence stories of great people and grand doings, until the young girl began to contrast her own unvarying mode of life with the changeful and pleasurable existence of those whom Nurse had conjured up, as it were, like living things before her.

Lucy had often gently chided Nurse for this imprudence, but the forgetfulness or wilfulness of age made her a frequent transgressor. The consequences which Lucy foresaw, her brother Jack feared also, and at last their mutual anxiety led them to take counsel together frequently on a subject so deeply interesting to all.

As Lucy never encouraged Florence in a repetition of these recollections, she soon ceased to speak of them to her mother, but as she was continually the companion of her father in his rides about the loca-

tion, she found in him a willing listener to the disguised legends of his own forsaken family, and much of his pleasant life began to assume the restraint of exile, and the regret of a forfeited position.

Jack was one day surprised as he sat at the kitchen window, making artificial flies for his favourite sport of angling, to hear old Nurse describe — though without using names — the family story, and to find little Florence had been crying from sympathy with her own representative. Jack was very angry, and later in the day was remonstrating with Nurse, when Warner joined them. Jack freely told him what had occurred, and urged him to request Nurse to be silent upon such subjects for the future. The appeal came too late, the seed was sown and grew slowly, very slowly, in the lonely Bush; but it was destined to blossom and bear fruit in a more congenial place.

From that day Warner was a changed man. Not much changed either; and had he been less beloved, it is possible that the alteration in him would have been unobserved. But the love which had left home and kindred, and had regarded five thousand miles across the sea but as a day's journey, to unite itself to another love which had come forth out of sorrow and injury, could not be deceived for a moment, and Lucy remembered her compact with her brother, and came to him to share her sorrow.

Poor Jack had a great, but not a quick head, and it required some days before he could devise a plan

which appeared to meet all the difficulties of the case. He hit upon one at last, and it needed all his brotherly love to propose it for the consideration of Warner and his wife.

Warner had had one of the moody fits to which he was now frequently disposed, and had only recovered his usual good-humour when supper was over, and old Nurse had retired to bed. Lucy had given a slight preliminary yawn, indicating her bedward intentions, when Jack filled his pipe, and requested another glass of grog, having, he said, a matter of importance to speak about, and which he wished both of them to sleep upon before they gave him an answer.

Lucy's heart beat quickly, for she surmised that what Jack was about to say, had reference to the subject they had so often discussed in secret.

"I have been thinking, George Warner," said Jack, "that the time is come when we ought to extend our business, or dissolve partnership." Jack would not observe the surprise this announcement occasioned, but giving two or three puffs at his pipe, he continued —

"Our flocks are numerous, our other stock flourishing and productive, but most of our profit goes to the middle-men at Bathurst and Sydney, and that, I think, ought to be avoided."

"What do you mean?" asked Warner, as Jack took a sip of grog, and then drew one long breath at his pipe, and blew the smoke in a wreath towards the ceiling.

"My meaning is very plain," continued Jack. "I

have seen for some time that our darling Florence," a slight pause here, "is growing out of Lucy's teaching, and that you both are aware of that. Now I propose (puff), taking that into consideration (puff), as well as the great amount for commissions we pay to the brokers and others (puff), that you, George Warner, should open a merchant's store either at Bathurst or Sydney (puff), and leave me to manage the location for the benefit of both." Jack puffed now so vehemently, that even his great bushy beard was lost in the clouds he emitted.

"Leave you here alone?" cried Lucy.

"Alone!" said Jack from his cloud.

"Oh, impossible!" said Warner. "Our life is dull enough as it is, but to live here alone — impossible."

"Not in the least," said Jack; "I shall prefer it. I want to see you and Lucy perfectly happy and Florence (puff) properly educated, and that I have long seen can't be done here in the Bush. If you can persuade old Nurse to stay with me, so much the better for me and for Floey, and —" The smoke, or something else, got into his throat, and he coughed rather violently for a minute.

Lucy put her arms about his neck, and kissed him; and when she could speak, she said —

"Dear, dear brother, your clever plan will not do. Neither I nor my good husband would consent to such a proposal. To leave you here lonely —"

"I'm never lonely now," interrupted Jack; "and

when my duties are increased a little, I shall not have time to think about myself. Now, go to bed, both of you. To-morrow is Sunday, so you can take an extra hour to talk it over; and if you don't come to my way of thinking, you don't deserve to have the care of such an angel as God has given to your keeping. Good night; and go along, and don't leave out the grog bottle!"

Jack spoke so authoritatively, that there was nothing to do but to obey him, and he was soon left alone with his pipe, for which he felt a growing affection, believing, as he did, that parental love would overcome any scruples of Warner and Lucy, and that he should soon find himself like Alexander Selkirk, the monarch of all he surveyed.

He was quite right in his conjecture; but he did not succeed to the throne of solitude until many fireside parliaments had been held, and great firmness had been displayed upon his part. Old Nurse, strange to say, elected to remain in the Bush, fearing, as she told Jack, that if she should be taken where there were any old women to talk to, she should be disclosing the family secret, and so defeat an object for which such sacrifices had been made.

It necessarily required some time to make arrangements for the new state of things, and it was surprising what a deal of business Jack found for himself abroad. He was evidently schooling himself for the life which was before him, and seeking to accustom

himself to absence from those whom he loved so dearly.

And this continued until within a few days of their departure, and then poor, simple heart! he seemed not to be able to bear Florence out of his sight. He played to her the old tunes upon his fiddle over and over again, making her sing to him the songs which she had learned by his rude teaching, and which she promised never to forget — no never! He gave her a rude drawing of the station, which he had made, and showed her upon it where he should live and sleep, and asked her to look at it sometimes, and blow a kiss to Uncle Jack, which he was sure some good angel would bring safely to him in the Bush.

He was very merry, nevertheless, for he had calculated well all the consequences of their separation, and knew that to secure happiness to those for whom he was surrendering so much, he must not allow them to believe they had left behind them a sorrowful, because a lonely man.

When the drays and waggons which bore away those he held dearest in the world, had started for Bathurst, Jack ran to a little eminence which commanded the most distant point of the road, and stood there, waving his hat, until the last of the departing train could be seen, and then he threw himself upon the grass and uttered words of prayer and thankfulness before returning to his own house, feeling, when he entered it, more desolate than he had ever done in his life before. His nearest neighbour lived some forty

miles distant; and before Warner reached *his* home, twice that space would be between them. But they should meet again very often; for what were the eighty miles or more which would lie between them to such hardy bushmen as they had become. They would be with him again before a year had passed, and he would take a holiday when he could, and pay them a visit, to witness the happiness he had procured for them at some sacrifice of his own.

Old Nurse should now have a free use of her memory and her tongue, and he would live with her in the times that were gone, and with those who had had their joys and sorrows in them. And so it came to pass, and Jack sat a patient listener night after night, until he could repeat all the old stories word for word, although when Nurse was most fluent in speech and clearest in recollection, he would often let his thoughts wander miles and miles away, sometimes to the colonial town where Lucy, Florence, and Warner were; and sometimes over the sea, to the graves in the churchyard, and to the homes of living friends, tarrying longer, perhaps, with one fair woman, whose presence would have filled all his heart and lonely home, had it been decreed that their lives should have been passed together.

The Warners were faithful to their engagement, and came every year to pass a month at least with Uncle Jack, but not to listen to old Nurse's stories longer, for she soon passed away, and Jack laid her under the shadow of a large tree, but still where the

setting sun could throw its parting rays upon the green turf which hid her dust. Faithfully had she discharged her trust, and a small marble stone bore testimony to her faithfulness, placed there by "her foster-son."

Matters prospered well at Bathurst with George Warner and Company; as time went on their names were known in the London markets, so that wealth came fast, so fast that the small colonial town was not large enough for its display, and the doting father thought of scenes more fitted to his child, of companions more worthy of her — station — yes, that was the word that ever and anon he heard in his waking dream.

CHAPTER XIV.

Another Acquaintance from the Old Country. — Jack Spraggatt learns more than he thinks for.

A BLUSTEROUS day in August was drawing to a close, and the distant plains and surrounding forest-trees looked cold and cheerless in their snowy covering, as Jack Spraggatt sat down to his lonely meal of tea and damper. Strange contrast to his early life, when it was a rare day that did not find some two or three friends at his hospitable board, and rarer still to have no familiar face to look upon, — no familiar voice to bid him welcome. The rude kitchen of his log-house would often fade before his eyes like pictures in a magic lantern, and change to the snug parlour of the Elms; and shadowy forms would glide about the room, and for awhile — a little while — supply the places of realities. And then all would pas away again, and he realised the place he occupied in this new land, and almost wondered how he had come to have a part to play there, so far away from all which had made his early life. He often found most cheering answers from an approving conscience, which told him he had fulfilled at his own self-sacrifice a duty imposed upon him and sanctified by death, and that he had striven hard and successfully to leave his father's name as honoured in his own land as when it came into his

keeping. It needed this approving voice, and something more, sometimes, to keep a good heart in the bosom of the lonely settler, and Jack never refused to welcome any comforter that came into his thoughts. "Lucy is happy, and Warner is happy, and my darling pet has the promise of a bright future, and I have helped them all a little," he would think. "And I am, or ought to be, without a care, so prosperous as we are at present. I have buried that hideous skeleton of debt, which made my life nothing but bitterness — thank God for that — never to rise again to haunt me and drive me almost mad. It is somewhat lonely, I confess, but then I can command companions at my will, and read the thoughts of such immortal men as Shakespeare, dear Oliver Goldsmith, and Robbie Burns. Have I not the Warners' visits to look forward to? Though there is the parting also, when the house seems to have had a joy removed that may not come again. Pshaw! I must put such a thought as that in my pipe and blow it away in smoke. Now, Hephzibah, bring another log or two, lass, and let us have a good fire. Tell your husband to learn what the dogs are barking at, and mind that the two shepherds who came in to-day have good suppers and warm beds. Poor fellows! they've a rough time of it in the plains."

The cause of the dogs' barking was not an unusual one at that time in the colony. It was a convict who had obtained his ticket searching for employment, which was not to be had so readily now that the winter had set in. Jack had ordered the man into the

house, and more wretchedness than was wrapped up in the rags and scraps of leather which composed the covering of the poor fellow, it would have been difficult to have found, even in New South Wales. The snow still clung to his matted hair and beard, and fell from him in flakes, as he sought with his benumbed hands for the document which entitled him to be at liberty.

"Never mind your ticket, man," said Jack; "thaw yourself first, and then we will know more about you."

The man muttered his thanks, and almost crept into the burning logs piled up in the chimney of the outer kitchen, whilst the shepherds, themselves old convicts, eyed him with curiosity, as though expecting to discover a former comrade. The eagerness with which the fellow ate his food, told plainly enough that his fast had been a long one, as no word was spoken by him until he had satisfied his hunger, and then it was to utter the briefest thanks, as he produced his ticket. Neither of the shepherds could read, and as Jack was content to look at the pass at a distance, not caring who the poor devil was that had sought food and shelter at his house, the man remained as much unknown as he was before the production of his papers, and appeared to be thankful when Jack ordered one of his shepherds to show him to his sleeping-place.

"If that wretched being could be paraded as he is, through every town in broad England," thought Jack, "it might deter the hesitating thief from risking such

a life, and perhaps frighten the boldest into a course of honesty. Transportation is only a word meaning a sea voyage and long absence to the prosperous rogue at home. Here it has other significations — bitter misery, deprivation, lingering death! Terrible expiation for violated laws which have been transgressed as often from ignorance as intention. It will be well if Society, that guards itself so carefully, can hold up a clean hand and say, 'I have done my duty to these children of sin, and so claim a right to punish the offenders.' It is a noisome task to dress the festering sore, but the good surgeon would try the experiment before he felt justified in amputating a limb. I fancy there is room enough in this colony to make half the future thieves of England into decent men, if Society would send us the very young, and let us train them to be honest. Poor devils! born thieves, bred thieves, believing detection the worst thing in this life (and they know of no other), what can await them but the gallows, the prison, or transportation? And there's no one to blame for all this — only Society."

As Jack was not oppressed by any superfluity in that way, he may be excused for this long soliloquy, the more so as he knocked out the ashes from his pipe, and went off to bed and slept all the better for his odd thoughts and his good deeds.

The snow fell fast in the morning, and no man with a heart in his bosom would have turned a wild dingo abroad if it had sought shelter at his hands. How could Jack, therefore, dismiss the poor wretch

who had come to him the night before, although he had no need for his labour? He bade him stay, and saw logs in an outhouse, the interior of which could be seen from the kitchen window. As Jack sat opposite to it eating a warm and substantial breakfast, the convict pursued his work; but at intervals he would pause and press his hand upon his side and beat his breast as though to deaden pain.

"Bless my heart!" said Jack; "the poor wretch may be ill, and we've set him to earn his breakfast of scraps at work that may be torture to him. A pretty sermonising humbug I am." So he rose, and, opening the window, called the man to come to him.

The convict made haste to obey the summons, and again involuntarily, it seemed, pressed his hand upon his side.

"Tell me, my man," said Jack, "are you in pain?"

"I am, sir," answered the man; "in great pain."

"Then why the devil didn't you say so?" asked Jack.

The man shook his head to and fro mournfully, as he replied, "Ah, sir, for eight years I have had to bear pain both of mind and body, and know that I must continue to bear it without complaining. I might have told you, though, had I given it a thought."

"Why me," asked Jack, "more than any one else about here?"

"Because Mr. John Spraggatt is not known to me

now for the first time. I knew you in the Old Country," replied the convict.

"Knew me?" said Jack. "I have lost all recollection of you."

"No doubt, sir; and no wonder," replied the man; "for what I have undergone must have made me more like a beast than the man I was. O Lord! what I have suffered during the last twelve years! It will be only transportation, I used to think; *only* transportation! Better have swung twenty times, I have thought since I have been here."

"What is your name, man?" asked Jack, rather sharply.

"I have come many miles to see you, Mr. Spraggatt. I am Ray — the miller Ray, whom you knew at Morden."

Jack fairly staggered from the open window, he was so shocked at the alteration in that wretched schemer.

Ray saw the action, and, shrugging his shoulders, said, hoarsely, "I don't wonder at your surprise, Mr. Spraggatt, if it is that which makes you recoil from me. If it is from remembering my offences, you must think that I have paid a terrible penalty for them."

"It was surprise, Ray — it was surprise," said Jack. "I have no reason to cast a stone at you."

"Perhaps not, — perhaps yes," replied Ray; "but I have come here to see you, and to die, I hope; for I think there is that at work within, which will set me free again."

"Come into the house," said Jack; "come in here, and let me hear what you have to say."

"First of all," said Jack, when Ray had seated himself, "what can I do to ease the pain you seem to suffer continually?"

"Nothing, I have been told — nothing, I hope; for I do not wish to live," replied Ray. "I have been dying, I believe, for these eight months past; and I should not have made the long journey I have done, but hearing from a pal that you had settled here — your name is somewhat singular — I could not rest until I had seen if you were the same as I had known at Morden. It seemed that it would be like having a glimpse of home again."

"And have you still the desire to return to England?" asked Jack, rather surprised that such a wretched creature should have any other wish than the one he had just expressed; namely, to die out of the world.

"Had I such a desire?" cried Ray. "It has been the one hope that has sustained me through all the dreadful sufferings of my convict life. I have dreamed of it waking and sleeping, and have been made very nearly mad when I have fancied it to be an impossibility. When I despaired of it at last, this gnawing, killing pain came; and I care not how soon its work is over."

The man evidently spoke with difficulty, and Jack proposed that he should rest himself for an hour or two; in the mean time some more decent clothing

should be found, and then he would see what could be done for the future.

Ray merely said "Thank you, sir," and followed the person who had been called to show him to a room in the house, where he could comply with Jack's proposed arrangements.

When Ray had left, Jack threw himself into a chair, and stretching out his legs to their full length, commenced an earnest investigation of the fire — that wondrous camera, more wonderful than the conjuror's boasted crystal, and wherein may be seen the mouldering relics of times gone by grow into life again among the glowing embers.

The business transaction at the mill, and the burglars' visit, Gerard's disgrace and the burning of the great house, all came back to him; and he could not help a presentiment that much of the perplexity of the past was about to be removed by the death-stricken convict beneath his roof. Under this conviction he became very restless, going to and fro between the stock-yard and the house, almost regretting the sleep permitted to the wretched man who could reveal so much which affected his dearest friend, George Warner.

Ray was greatly benefited in appearance when he again entered the kitchen, where Jack awaited him, and very few words passed between them before Ray became absorbed in deep reflection, as though uncertain how he should commence to unburthen himself of the "perilous stuff" by which he was oppressed.

"I have sought you out —" he said at last — "I have sought you out as much for my own sake as for that of others, whom I never intentionally injured, but who have suffered very grievously from my silence, when a word or two from me would have made justice a little more evenhanded. I did speak once under a promise which has been shamefully broken to me. It matters little now when the journey's so nearly over."

Ray then ran over so much of his early life as we already know, and do not care to hear again, and until his appearance at Morden, as tenant of the mill.

"At that time I had resolved," he said, "to live an honest life, having been bred a miller; but temptation came in my way, and I could not resist the prospects of easier gains to be obtained by a confederacy with other rogues."

"How came you to select Morden for your residence?" asked Jack.

"Jasper's wife is, or was — for sometimes I think her dead — my only sister; and when she left London to live at Morden, I could not rest away from her, for she was the only one that ever loved me in the wide world, except my poor mother. Bless you, Barbara, dead or living!"

He paused for a moment or two and then went on.

"Jasper married her for the money she had, not caring how it had been obtained, or from whom. He was always a lucky man, and matters throve with him. He lent me money to carry on my business as 'receiver,' taking a large share of my gains, I need not say. He

suspected, I fancy, that all was not honestly come by, but he kept a quiet conscience by asking no questions. That he thought I was playing a dangerous game I am satisfied, for one day he proposed that I should execute a deed giving him power of sale over all I possessed. I consented conditionally."

Ray paused, and a smile passed over his face, and his eye twinkled for a moment at some pleasing recollection.

"Well, you know all that happened; how he claimed priority of the Government, and succeeded in obtaining possession, although at that time I did not owe him a farthing, having repaid all which he had lent me. Now comes one of my great grievances. Before I was sent to the hulks, I had an interview with Jasper Jellifer, and it was arranged — solemnly arranged, that Jasper should transmit to me, whenever I required it, the money due to me under that bill of sale. As soon as I obtained my ticket — three years ago — I wrote home to Jasper; but after waiting many weary months, no answer came. I wrote again to Barbara, and as yet no answer. I can't believe that Jasper would play me false, or that my sister, if she be living, would allow him to do so; and I have sought you out, Mr. Spraggatt, to learn if you know anything about my relatives?"

Jack was sadly disappointed at this termination of Ray's communication, and therefore he briefly replied by telling him of his last visit to the mill, when he

thought he had found Jasper with the Bow-street runner Higgler.

"Higgler!" cried Ray, "Curse me if I have not thought that possible, often — very often."

"What do you mean?" asked Jack.

"That Higgler was put up to much that he knew by some close friend of mine, and it might have been Jasper! If I were sure of that!"

Ray paused, and a dark shadow overspread his face, dark as the black thoughts in his mind. Jack cared little for this roguish conspiracy, if there had been one, his whole desire was to learn what Ray knew of the story of the bracelet.

"Ah!" said Ray, "I am glad I made a clean breast of that matter before I was lagged, although Sir John has not acted fairly by me."

"How so?" asked Jack.

"It was a bargain between us, that he should use his influence with the big wigs at home and out here to get me some respite from my convict labour; but when he had learned my secret, he dropped me altogether."

"Sir John died before you were sent away," said Jack, "the day after his interview with you at Newgate."

"What!" cried Ray, starting up. "Died! I remember well that when I had told him that Gilbert, and not Gerard, was the thief, he left my cell suddenly, and — died the next day! Good Lord! perhaps I killed him."

Jack had risen also, and, seizing Ray's arm with the grip of a vice, said: "Gilbert, and not Gerard, was the thief! and this you proved to Sir John."

"Yes," answered Ray.

"I see it all," cried Jack. "The old father's heart broke when he knew the injustice he had done to the noblest, best of sons. And did Jasper know of this?"

"Yes," replied Ray.

"The old scoundrel!" exclaimed Jack, quite beside himself with rage. "I'll go back to England, drag him into the market place and make him declare the truth upon his knees! Why was he silent?"

"Because he thought it his interest to be so. Jasper only knew the truth from me, and after the mischief had been done. You do intend to go to the Old Country again, then, some day?" asked Ray.

"Well, perhaps," replied Jack.

Ray paused, and then said abruptly, "Are you certain it was Higgler that you found with Jasper at the mill?"

"Nearly so," replied Jack. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I could never guess how he got so closely on my track, unless — unless Jasper Jellifer betrayed me. No, I won't believe that either — for Barbara's sake, I won't believe that."

Ray was evidently much moved, and walked up and down the long room some moments before he could continue to speak.

"Do you remember the night I bought your wheat, and the night after your sister's wedding?" asked Ray.

"Distinctly," replied Jack, "and that a burglary was attempted on each occasion. You kept watch the last time. I could swear it now."

"Quite right, sir, I am sorry to say; and on that occasion Jasper put the thought into my head by wondering some one did not attempt such a robbery. Higgler was put up to both the jobs, and would have grabbed me for them had we been successful. He told me so — and who told him, I wonder?"

Both Jack and Ray ceased speaking, each busied with the thoughts which this retrospect had awakened; and both continued silent until Ray was seized with an acute attack of pain, and, begging to be taken to his resting-place, the two shepherds were called, and assisted him from the room.

Jack was glad to be left alone, being perplexed as to the course he was to pursue. It was easy to take horse to Bathurst and communicate all he had heard to Warner, but what good was to come of that? Ray might not care to repeat what he had said, if he conjectured that it could be used to the disadvantage of his sister, for whom he had expressed such strong affection, even in his present degraded position; and it might therefore only reopen a wound in Warner's heart, which it was to be hoped had healed long ago. And yet, Sir John had known the truth before he died, and the knowledge of that circumstance would necessarily be a satisfaction to the injured son. So Jack resolved to find some business in the morning to take him to Bathurst, when he would seek an op-

portunity of communicating what he had learned to his sister Lucy.

The snow fortunately had ceased to fall, and a sharp frost succeeding, Jack resolved to make tracks for Bathurst, giving orders to his household that Ray should be cared for and left to his own discretion.

Jack was always a welcome visitor at Bathurst, and more so, if possible, when he came unexpectedly; and he was never so happy as when his darling Florence was by his side, combing his rough hair or singing one of the songs he had taught her in the Bush, or playing in the clumsiest way imaginable upon the only piano known to exist at that time in Bathurst. He had hitherto found no opportunity of speaking to Lucy alone, and when he looked upon the happy group of husband, wife, and child assembled in their pleasant home, he feared he might prove the serpent that was destined by his fatal gift of increased knowledge to destroy their paradise. However, he had come nearly one hundred miles to tell Lucy his story, and he could not return with it unsaid. So one day, when Warner was to be absent from morning till evening, Jack repeated all that Ray had told him, leaving her to determine what course should be pursued.

Lucy was greatly affected at her brother's communication, and her reasons for being so were wifelike enough. Hitherto, they had lived peacefully and contentedly in the rough, young colony, desiring no other distinction than what their own character and success procured for them, and Warner appeared to have

forgotten almost that he had had an ancestry or could have claimed to be its head, had he not foresworn of his own free will its advantages for ever. Might not this tale make the past appear less dreadful? Might it not revive desires which yet slumbered in her husband's breast, although long thought to be dead ashes, making him regret the position he had abandoned and stimulating him to regain it?

Her course of duty, however, was clear as light. Whatever the consequence, Ray's story must be told to her husband, and the result be left to that Providence which had never failed her hitherto.

When Jack returned to his home in the Bush he found his convict guest much weakened by an increase of pain, which received but slight mitigation from the sedatives which he had considerately brought from Bathurst, where he had had the opportunity of consulting a surgeon.

Ray had been writing a great deal during Jack's absence, and usually destroying one day what he had written the day before. He said this, and declared it to be consequent on what he had heard concerning Jasper's apparent intimacy with Higgler, and which had disturbed him greatly.

"It is a dreadful thought, Mr. Spraggatt," he said, "to have on your mind, that all I have suffered should have come from the treachery of the man I did trust with my life."

"I might have been mistaken," replied Jack; "I

only saw the person I thought to be Higgler for a moment."

"You only saw me for a moment in the moonlight, and yet you knew your man, Mr. Spraggatt," said Ray. "I wish I had never had these doubts of Jasper, but the more I think of the past, the more I suspect that he has sold me, or why no answer to my letters?"

"They, or the answers, may have miscarried," observed Jack.

"Yes, they may, and Jasper shall have the benefit of the doubt; but if he be not a true man, I may reach him in England from my grave, here in the Bush."

The business of the location called Jack abroad for some time, and when he returned, Ray had written over several sheets of paper which he had divided into two packets bound about with string, and fastened with knots. One was addressed

"No. 1. Jasper Jellifer,
England.

Which I shall never see again, R. R."

The other packet was superscribed, "If Jasper Jellifer, on the receipt of the packet addressed to him and numbered '1,' hands to you £200 for your care and kindness to me in this time of great suffering and death, then this packet No. 2, is to be delivered to him also. Should he not comply with my rightful demand upon him, then this packet is to be opened by you, Mr. John Spraggatt, or by any one whom you may appoint."

"Keep these packets apart, sir," said Ray, "and should you ever return to the Old Country, honestly try what No. 1 will produce. If he does not do what I have requested, open No. 2."

Jack believed there was as little chance of one event occurring as the other, when he locked up those packets in his *bureau*, nor thought for one moment how the living and the dead would be brought again together by the conjurations written therein.

The disease which was at war with Ray's life marched on slowly, silently, and surely to its ultimate conquest, and the quietude of the sufferer's present existence made him more sensible of the approaches of his grim enemy.

How lightly had he spoken and thought of death when engaged in the whirl of pleasure, or in his struggles with the mad misery of his suffering consequent upon his life of crime! But now, when subjected to no exciting condition, except physical pain, and left in the great solitudes which surrounded him, to commune with his guilty self, how terrible appeared the conqueror who was to lead him captive into the realms of the unknown future. His early years had not been without some religious training, and as it has been justly said: —

"Man is a religious being. He is everywhere a worshipper. In every age and country, and in every stage, from the highest intellectual culture to the darkest stupidity, he bows with homage to a superior Being; be it the rude-carved idol of his own fabrica-

tion, or the unseen divinity that stirs within him, it is still the object of his adoration."

Ray was no exception to this teaching, and he began to be anxious concerning that future which he felt to be as true as the light and darkness of every day, and the growth and the decay of every season.

Jack Spraggatt was a simple, earnest man, who had received the divine truth as a little child, and his faith had grown with time and all the changes brought by it; and so he strove to be a teacher and a comforter to the miserable man who had sought him out, to lay bare his miseries before him.

"Your last resting-place on earth is to be here," Jack said one day when Ray had suffered greatly in mind and body, "and death ought to be made welcome. It should be regarded as the angel which releases our souls from the trammels of mortality, and opens the gates of a world where peace is eternal."

The struggle was long and difficult before Ray would acknowledge the truth of Jack's simple teaching, but conviction came at last, and when most needed.

It was Christmas-day, and the heat within doors was stifling and most oppressive, especially to the dying man, therefore Jack had had a couch carried out under the verandah. Ray had remained some time without speaking to the boy who had been appointed to attend upon him, and his breathing became more difficult every minute. At last he started up and with great effort requested that Mr. Spraggatt might be brought to him. Jack was sitting under the shade of the gum-

tree which grew by old Nurse's grave, and anticipating that Ray's dying hour had come, instantly joined the sufferer.

"All is over, sir, — but I could not pass away without thanking you — that I die in peace." Ray had spoken with great difficulty, and a fit of coughing which succeeded, left him much exhausted.

"Those papers," he gasped at length — "I gave you — destroy" — he could say no more.

"I understand all you desire, and if I return to England, will endeavour to fulfil your wishes." Jack addressed a deaf ear, for Ray was dead. In the time to come Jack remembered all that had passed at this closing scene, and believed that the last words of the dying convict had had a better meaning than the construction which he had then given to them.

Jasper Jellifer, far away over the sea, in England, kept that Christmas morning in his counting-house (he had grown to be a thriving man, and finding Morden too small a place for his money-making ability, had settled himself in London) and there he counted his gains, and no windfall had prospered better or borne goodlier fruit than the produce of the goods and chattels and other effects of Raymond Ray, the convict miller then dying in New South Wales.

Jack Spraggatt had returned to the Bush some days before Lucy had had an opportunity of speaking to her husband on the subject uppermost in her mind, as Warner had requested her never to allude to the past, unless at times when he himself reverted to it,

and for a while she hesitated to disobey his injunction. Warner was greatly excited when Lucy told him the revelation made by Ray, and he uttered words of thankfulness on hearing that his father had been made cognisant of his innocence of the cruel charge which had driven him forth a wanderer. Again and again he asked Lucy to repeat the story which he connected with the account Jack had given him of his father's death-bed, and his anger against Gilbert and Lady Norwold, whom he presumed to have been acquainted with her son's iniquity, broke forth in more violent expressions than Lucy had ever heard from his lips before, and he more than once regretted the solemn vow he had taken to forego his claim to the inheritance and title of his ancestors.

Lucy avoided remonstrance, trusting that time and reflection would restore that contentment which had hitherto made their lives so peaceful and so happy. She thought that her expectation had been realised after a few days, and then she ventured to say, "Dear husband, have not our lives been such as we should choose to live again, if we had the power to recal the years which are gone? What have we to regret? Honoured as you are by all who know you, beloved by those who know you best, what more could inherited wealth bestow than that which you have achieved for yourself."

"True! true, my dear Lucy," he replied. "There is nothing to regret in what I have abandoned. A new name in a new world is better than an inheritance

tainted as it would ever have been in the old, for men are prone to remember evil of each other, and

'Calumny
'Will sear Virtue itself.'"

Gladly would she have believed that that conviction was ever in his thoughts; but a love so complete as her own was far too watchful not to discover the slightest indication of any disturbing influence, and Lucy found many. They were only like passing clouds, but they served to cast a shadow upon the stream, although for a single minute. When Jack first told him of the destruction of Norwold Hall, Warner appeared to be gratified that the scene of his disgrace should have perished; but now, he spoke of the loss of the old place regretfully, as though he had latent hopes which might have found realisation in the home of his fathers, had the fire spared it. Sometimes, when they were alone, he would speak of what his daughter might become, could she take her place with her own lineage, until Lucy almost feared that he would in time repent that he had wedded her, so lowly born compared to the one he would have selected had he been less unhappy. Then came the remembrance of all their married life, when love was everywhere, and she reproached herself for allowing such an unworthy thought to have possession of her mind for a moment.

CHAPTER XV.

Uncle Jack has his Own Way again.

FLORENCE was now seventeen, and her character beginning to develope its tendencies to good and evil. She had much of her mother's firmness and gentleness, marred by a waywardness which sometimes became unamiable. Like most over-indulged children, she appeared occasionally to be deficient in affection to those who had claim to her most devoted love, and would rarely confess to the wilfulness which her own reflection generally condemned. There were none to censure her — neither father, mother, nor Uncle Jack, — for to all she was ever the most faultless being in the wide world. Had she claimed the place which her father at times regretted she had lost, she could not have been more commanding, or more readily obeyed, than as the daughter of the colonist, George Warner. Poor child! she was not to blame for the infirmities of her character, petted and caressed as she had been. There was a little dross among the gold which the fire of adversity might some day refine away.

It was not surprising that Warner should have occasional discontents, the offspring of his early training and associations, and he had been brave indeed, to set them aside as he had done, until the provocation to their indulgence became very strong.

Florence one day ran into the room where Warner and Lucy were sitting, holding in her hand a newspaper from England, the possession of which she had secured by intercepting the clerk on his way from the counting-house.

"Look, mamma," said Florence, seating herself on her mother's footstool, and spreading out the English newspaper on her lap. "Here is a story so like the one old Nurse used to tell me frequently, that I should not wonder if the persons are not the same, for she never could remember their names. It is called the 'Court of Chancery before the Lord Chancellor, *in re* Norwold,' whatever that means. 'This was an application by Gilbert Norwold, Esq., of Norwold Hall, in the county of ——, to be permitted to assume the title and entailed estates of his late father, Sir John Norwold. It appeared by the affidavits put in, that Gerard, the elder son of Sir John, shortly before his father's death, twenty-two years ago, was discarded by him for some cause not set forth, and that no tidings of Gerard had been obtainable from that time until the present, although diligent search and inquiries had been made in England and elsewhere. At the time of the said Gerard's departure, a coat and waistcoat, known to be his, were found on the banks of the river' (just as they were in Nurse's story,) 'and were thought to have been placed there in order to mislead the friends of the fugitive. It is now assumed that the said Gerard committed suicide, and that his body was carried out to sea.' In Nurse's story, the young man,

you know, went abroad, and was married to a beautiful lady, and had a lovely little daughter. Do you think, papa, they could have been the same persons?" but Florence found that her father had left the room, and that her mother's face was pale, and that she was greatly moved.

"Papa gone? What is the matter, mamma? You are not well, dear!" said Florence, rising and placing her arms round her mother's neck.

"I shall be better, love, in a few moments; the weather has been so warm; and — please fetch me the smelling salts from my bed-room."

Florence hastened to obey her mother's request, and Lucy hastily seized the newspaper and read rapidly all that Florence had been reading. It was true! Gilbert Norwold was seeking his brother's birthright. Not waiting the return of Florence, Lucy hastened in search of her husband, and found him in his own room at the counting-house, reading the report in one of the other London papers, and, as she expected, greatly agitated by the knowledge of his brother's proceedings.

"The hardened villain!" exclaimed Warner; "with the knowledge of the wrong he has done me, he has dared to seek the reward of his infamy by supplanting me in my birthright. How knows he that I am not biding my own time to claim my rights, or that I may have children whom his perfidy has not reached? He has not repented of his sin against me, or he would have avoided rather than have sought to bear a title which must always remind him of his crimes."

"It is always difficult for me, dear husband," said Lucy, "to speak to you upon this subject, remembering as I do, that by your love I have been raised up, whilst you, by what has passed, have been driven from your higher place, and that must be hard to bear."

"No Lucy, no. It was not hard to bear until now that I know my dishonourable brother has sought to reap advantage from his damnable treachery!" exclaimed Warner.

"That has only made endurance more difficult, dear husband," replied Lucy, placing her arms around his neck; "for I have seen, dear, again and again, that old feelings, old expectations, old ambitions, come back to you when you thought none could guess the cause of the clouded brow and the heaving bosom, and the fixed eye that was looking back into the past when you bore another name, not more honourable than the one you have made honoured; but still it was yours by birthright, a legacy from a noble ancestry."

"Well."

"What prevents you claiming again that which you regret so much to have abandoned?" asked Lucy, calmly.

"Lucy!" cried Warner, looking at her with surprise; "you, also, wish to have your true place in the world? You wish me to claim my own?"

"Your words seem to upbraid me, dear husband, because I would have you consult your happiness, not mine. What should I gain by the exchange? Nothing,

for hitherto I have been a most happy wife, a most happy mother. The yeoman's daughter would not be so regarded as to have her happiness increased. With you it might be otherwise. You might realise some of the bright dreams of your youth, you might take your place among your equals, and add new lustre to a name known already in the annals of our country. Take counsel with yourself, and if you decide that duty requires you to press your claims to distinction, or if you believe that your life would be made happier by the change, be resolute, and do at once what you elect to be the better for your peace."

"And do you counsel this, Lucy?" asked Warner.

"I counsel only contentment."

"And you, should I resolve upon this change — are you prepared to give up all which has hitherto made the happiness of your life?" he asked.

"All!" replied Lucy, and kissing his forehead fondly, she left him to his own reflections.

They did not meet again until supper-time, and then Florence resumed the subject which had been occupying her mind all the evening.

"Do you think, papa, those are the people old Nurse spoke of? And if so, will the elder son not claim his title and fortune?" asked Florence.

"I think not," replied Warner, in a calm, grave voice. "Nurse did not tell you all. Nurse did not tell you that once upon a time, when the devoted wife believed that her husband regretted his lost position, that regardful only of her husband's happiness, she

urged him to regain what he had so long abandoned, although she believed, and truly, that those who would then have been her husband's friends would have looked upon her coldly, perhaps contemptuously, as an intruder amongst them, and that her place might have been apart from his, for whom she had left home and kindred, and shared the privations of a struggling man. Self-sacrificing, truly loving, she forgot all that pertained to her own future in her regard for him and his unsettled fancies. And it was not until he saw all this, and reflected how they had hitherto made their two lives one, hoping, loving, sorrowing, and rejoicing always together, that he crushed out the last spark of those old remembrances which might have been fanned into a flame, and burned out the record of an oath solemnly sworn and hitherto faithfully fulfilled."

Florence noted not the love that was in her mother's face, or the tears which flowed from her mother's eyes, but said —

"You are a very naughty papa to defend such folly. I am sure if I were the young girl, I would never forgive those who prevented me being a lady."

Miss Floey then went to her piano, and played away with more emphasis than was consistent with proper expression. Possibly her energetic fingering proceeded from inefficiency, possibly from a little ill-temper.

Uncle Jack had been expected to make one of the family party on Christmas-day, but he was, as we know, away in the Bush, keeping Christmas like a

Christian man, by the side of a dying sinner. The Warners were disturbed at his absence, the more so, as there had been one of those terrible droughts which, at intervals, visit New South Wales, decimating the flocks and herds of the settlers; and it was feared that Jack was detained by home anxieties. Warner had disposed of his share in the location to his brother-in-law, and the loss would, therefore, have to be borne solely by Jack. Warner sincerely wished it had been otherwise, as he had done so much to increase the value of the property, that it seemed ungrateful to sell him a loss; but he found when Jack arrived that he had taken his disasters very easily, and looked forward to the next year to compensate him, repudiating, with a hearty laugh, Warner's offer to bear a share in his ill-fortune.

"Not a shilling, my dear boy, not a shilling," cried Jack. "Next year I will have the stockbook as full as ever. Next year I have two or three new experiments to carry out that will astonish, not only the natives, but surprise the 'cutest of settlers. Next year I shall build a new location, with some European improvements, which have become necessary since Floey has grown a young lady, and prefers a piano to Uncle Jack's old fiddle, when she comes to visit him."

And so the next year was to bring many changes, and one or two that Mr. Spraggatt did not contemplate when enumerating his own projects.

There were letters from Madame Letty, sister Letty, who married Mons. Fichard. They usually came twice

a year, and were always welcome, seeming to bring with them a breath from the Old Country. Her husband had been fairly prosperous; and though she was childless, her married life had been pleasant enough.

"Mons. Fichard had," she said, "been not in the best of health of late, and had resolved, therefore, to return to his native Paris, where he had a manufactory and be content with an agent in London."

Letty was very pleased with this arrangement, as she had spent a month or two every year in that gay city, and coveted its pleasures. All this is small news, but "trifles make the sum of human things;" and Letty's contributions were destined to produce greater results than she had contemplated when inditing them. Aunt Letty was a great favourite with Florence, who often expressed her wish to know her, and to hear from her own lips about the gay balls, the plays and operas, accounts of which usually occupied some pages of her long epistles. These letters Floey would carry to her own room, and read over carefully, contrasting their vivid descriptions of Letty's amusements with the humdrum existence she led at Bathurst.

Thus, as small birds carry little seeds from which grow great plants, Aunt Letty's letters implanted desires and fancies which cast a shadow for awhile over more lives than one.

The postscript of one of Madame Letty's communications contained her new address in Paris, and concluded with these memorable words: —

"And, oh! my dear Lucy, if I could only see you,

and your dear husband, or my darling little niece, whom I love so much, or dear, old Jack, whom I love more than all of you, in my *maison*, I should be *so*, *so* happy."

Florence loved her aunt more than ever.

Florence rarely spoke with her mother, though loving her very dearly, of her girlish interest in these pleasant descriptions of Aunt Letty, as their conversation generally terminated in a little maternal sermonising, which was not always agreeable to the young lady. With her father it was otherwise. He listened to her "pretty prattle" with a smile, and would often entertain her by recitals of his own early experiences; until Florence wondered how he could have abandoned such pleasant society for a lonely home in the Bush, or the little less dreary residence in the money-grubbing town of Bathurst.

But Uncle Jack was even a better listener than papa, as he not only had recollections of similar events, but sometimes spoke as though a time might possibly come when the Old Country should be revisited again, and all the fairy tales they had told to each other be realised. Had the postscript to Aunt Letty's letter put that into Uncle Jack's head? and into Warner's also? for as the three elder people sat together one night, after Florence had gone to bed, the conversation turned upon it.

"I almost wish it were possible —" said Warner, thoughtfully.

Lucy and Jack awaited elucidation.

"I mean, that I wish it were possible for Florence to have for a short time, and when she is of an age to profit by it, the opportunity of better studies and better society than she can have here."

Lucy thought that the old story contest was about to be resumed, and shook her head reprovingly, smiling as she did so.

"No! no!" said Warner, understanding her meaning. "Never more, I have said that. Nevertheless, as I do not promise to spend all my life in the colony, I should wish Florence to be equal to any European society we may choose to cultivate."

Poor Lucy's heart sank within her, and she looked towards Jack for comfort. None came, however, for he said —

"I have thought the same, Warner, very often, and could never see my way to the accomplishment of such a desirable state of things." Lucy's spirits revived, only to be more cruelly depressed, as Jack added — "until now."

"Good gracious, brother," Lucy always called him brother when he was a little out of favour. "You must be mad to think of such a possibility."

"Nay, nay," said Warner; "let us hear what he has to suggest. Hermits, like Jack, have bright revelations made to them, and more time for reflection than we busy town-folk. Florence is now rather more than seventeen, and a voyage to Europe would bring her nearly to eighteen. She is a clever girl, and would

know how to profit by example and instruction. Letty has expressed a wish to see us —"

"Letty," cried Lucy, colouring deeply, "Letty is a kind, loving woman; but surely you would not infer that she is a better instructress than myself?"

"Of course not," replied Jack, taking a long pull at his pipe. "Not *herself;* but living as she does now in the most refined city in the world, she could procure the best masters and mistresses, and so have Florence instructed."

Lucy, like most other mothers on similar occasions, declared that she would not hear of such a proposal; and Warner, like most married men under like circumstances, entreated her to talk calmly over the matter, as he had had thoughts in the same direction.

"Your sister," he said, "is in a good position, we know something of her husband's family, and if she would undertake the charge of Florence, it might — mind, I only say it might — be desirable to let the child have the advantage that Jack hints at."

Jack had done more than hint; and if ever Lucy had felt a real anger against her brother, it was at that moment.

"I really cannot consent even to discuss such an absurd, such a cruel suggestion. Florence is neither ignorant, nor ill-mannered; and for the station she is *now* expected to occupy, will be accomplished enough. Pray, say no more."

"Very well," replied Jack.

"Indeed," continued Lucy, in spite of her own in-

junction to silence — women rarely know when it is dangerous to pursue a defeated enemy, — "indeed, if such an arrangement were desirable, how could she be sent to Europe? Not alone, surely? I am the only person who could be sent with her, if you thought me sufficient protection on such a voyage."

"True," replied Warner; "I had never thought of that!"

"Nor I," said Jack, again adding — "until now."

"Very well. Then such being the case, it is useless to continue the subject."

Lucy could not help doing so. "I should be glad, very glad, if Florence could have the advantage of better teachers than I am. It might possibly be agreeable to her in after life, especially should papa determine to return to England; but women of moderate acquirements are generally equal to the occasion, and rise with their position, and I have no doubt but Florence would do the same."

Jack puffed away at his pipe, and Warner stirred his grog, allowing Lucy time to regain her usual composure.

Jack saw that she had accomplished what to her was not a very difficult matter, and he then ventured to say:

"My dear Lucy, as you seem to have acknowledged that what I suggested was rather desirable than otherwise had it been possible of accomplishment, you don't think me mad, and are not angry with me?"

"No, you dear old goose," replied his sister —

"not now, but I own you did vex me at first. You men are so inconsiderate where women are concerned, and you would have shipped poor Floey off like a bale of wool, and put her down in an invoice."

The two men laughed good-humouredly at their defeat, and the matter was at an end — so Lucy thought.

The long-looked-for rain came at last, and Jack Spraggatt was in great spirits, although it kept him a prisoner indoors during the greater part of the day. He employed himself in writing to his sister Letty, preferring the counting-house to the parlour for the operation, and never told any one what he had done, or why he had posted the letter himself.

Nothing more was said in open council about the educational project, although Warner and Jack, it must be confessed, meanly discussed the subject at odd times when they were together; but Lucy had mentioned such a formidable obstacle to its fulfilment that it seemed to be impossible of realisation.

Jack's Christmas holidays were at an end, and despite the rain, he set off for his lonely home in the Bush, being more excited at parting than was customary with him. No doubt the welcome rain had something to do with it, as every hour's fall was worth a head or two of cattle, and they were not to be neglected after the losses occasioned by the long drought.

When he had been fairly gone some four or five hours, Warner was surprised to receive by a messenger

a letter, directed in Jack's hand-writing. That stupid Bushman had a great objection to personal communication whenever he had to ask a favour or to offer a service, and as he now wanted to do both, he had had recourse to pen, ink, and paper.

The letter ran thus:

"My dear Warner, — The conversation which we had on the subject of Florence's education has never been out of my head. I have thought of it night and day, until I have come to the following conclusion and determination.

"Lucy, you, and I are all of opinion that there could be nothing more desirable for our darling's advantage than the suggestion *we* made; but Lucy very properly mentioned a difficulty, which I now fancy can be overcome. This bountiful rain will make the matter easy. I reckon that I am worth at least 8000 *l.*, and as I have no debts (thank God!) I am an independent man for the rest of my days. My next neighbour is my old townsman of whom we used to talk in days gone by, and, as you know, one of the richest men in the colony. Now as this glorious rain will put him into good spirits, as it has done me, I intend to call upon him in a few days and offer him my location just as it stands — stock and block, and I know he will be glad to purchase. Having completed that bargain to our mutual satisfaction, I am determined to go to Europe; and if you will do me the favour to entrust our darling Florence to my care,

I shall be the happiest Uncle Jack in the new world or the old. My own DETERMINATION nothing shall change. I shall communicate all my great schemes for next year to the purchaser of my location, and so nothing will be lost to the colony by my secession.

"Now, dear Warner — dearest Lucy, consider over again our talk concerning the future of our darling, and make a parental sacrifice for her lifelong benefit. I know I am a selfish old fellow in asking this, because I shall not have to part with her as you will have to do; but I am sure if I were in your place I could bring myself to the separation, knowing how much she has to gain by it.

"I wrote to Letty when I was at Bathurst, proposing that *we* should come over to her. She will be delighted no doubt, and by the time her answer arrives in the colony all can be prepared for our departure by the next ship.

"I have nothing more to add than I have already said to you, so with love to you all,

"Believe me your affectionate Brother-in-law,

"JOHN SPRAGGATT."

There was an end of the great difficulty! There was the little one with Lucy to be surmounted; but as all her life she had made small sacrifices for those she loved, this greater one — the greatest she had then been called upon to make, either as sister, mother, or wife, was accepted also — and humbly putting her trust in the One who had supported her through other

trials, she consented to part with more than half her heart.

Letty's letter came in due time; it was full of loving welcome, and Jack sold himself up a second time to gratify a love which had grown stronger than common, because of an earlier one which he had known years ago. Florence was delighted at times when anticipating the approaching change; at others she thought it would be impossible to part from those dear ones who had made her life so happy. Nor were Lucy and her husband without their alternations of joy and sorrow when contemplating the separation from their child; and when the parting hour arrived, and Florence was gone, they were dearer to each other than ever they had been throughout their wedded lives.

O treacherous sea! that, smooth as a mirror, hidest beneath thee unfathomable deeps, and dangerous shoals, and hidden rocks to make wreck of so many, many brave ships, less treacherous art thou than the sea of life, where there are deeps, and shoals, and rocks, but where shipwreck is often nearest when the sun shines brightest, and the breezes sigh odorous with the breath of flowers.

CHAPTER XVI.

Gilbert Norwold proves that a bad Son makes a bad Father.

THE events which occurred in England, from the time that Gilbert Norwold attained his majority have now to be regarded. The property he inherited under the will of his father, and the settlement of his mother, was not very considerable, although it was sufficient for the moderate requirements of an English gentleman. Gilbert was what is termed a man of pleasure, but he combined with his own unrestrained enjoyments, an almost miserly care of his money, and bought his selfish pleasures as cheaply as possible.

He made no friends, and sought few associates among persons of his own station in society, nor was his morose and selfish disposition likely to invite advances from others. The few persons of his acquaintance were, therefore, somewhat surprised when it was announced in the *Morning Post*, that Mr. Gilbert Norwold, had married the only daughter of a country banker, reported to be very rich, and possessing considerable county influence. The marriage had been one with which strong affection on either side had had little to do, as the lady had given away her first love to one whom her father had rejected, and who paid the penalty of his presumption, for loving in his

poverty the rich man's daughter, by the abandonment of his native land, and hard service in India. So, having parted with the great treasure of her maiden love, there was only left a gentle, amiable woman, who passively yielded up her future hopes to the will of her father, and he had decided to entrust them to the keeping of Mr. Gilbert Norwold. What Gilbert's consideration was in seeking this union, it is very easy to guess, and to express by one word, "Money;" and as that could be obtained with no particular objectionable contingency, by his union with Laura Ravenshaw, he married her. Ready cash and formal settlements supplied the want of mutual love, and gay dresses, merry bells and great feasting, made the wedding-day appear a happy one; and there were lookers-on, struggling with many of the difficulties of life, who silently envied the more prosperous fortunes of the young bride and bridegroom, as their neat travelling carriage rolled away from the banker's door.

For some time this union proved to be, not a happy one certainly, as some doting men and women estimate wedded happiness, neither was it altogether unhappy, as neither husband nor wife had brought much expectation of affectionate recognition from each other. Gilbert went his way as it pleased him best, with no regard or inquiry as to the pleasure of his wife, and she, too indifferent as to the pursuits of her husband, was rarely disturbed by a course of conduct, which a more interested woman would have construed into neglect. When her son was born, she felt that a

blessing had come into her home, although his birth had brought her loss of health, and consequently greater estrangement on the part of her husband. It was well for her that she had found this comfort, as an unexpected cause of great sorrow and disunion came with the death of her father.

The settlement which had been made at her marriage, provided for the payment of certain moneys, when the banker had no further use for his wealth; but as an elder son would inherit from his father, the money thus secured was to pass to any second child, living at the time of the mother's death, and failing such issue Gilbert became sole inheritor, provided he should survive his wife. The old banker had been a clever schemer and manager, a driver of hard bargains, and a bold speculator during his lifetime; but like many other sharp adventurers, he had ended in failure so complete, that simple men wondered how he had contrived to die in the odour of respectability.

The compact, therefore, between Gilbert Norwold and Laura Ravenshaw — they had called it marriage — was at an end, at least, so far as he was concerned. All the promises which he had made at the altar, were cancelled in his mind by the failure of the banker to keep the covenants of the settlement, for which he had sold his liberty, and there was in no corner of his heart one hidden love to whisper a word of kindliness or consideration, for the mother of his child. He had been wronged, deeply wronged, where he could feel

injury the most, by the dead father of his wife, and he revenged himself upon her, by as much domestic tyranny as he could exercise without interfering with his own convenience. He made ostentatious retrenchments of expenses, and dismissed one or two servants immediately necessary to the comfort of his wife, whose declining health required more than ordinary attention. "This great loss," he would say, "must be met by economy, and if that is disagreeable to you, you must only blame the old rogue who has occasioned it." This was a bitter thing to hear, as Laura loved her father, despite the one cruel act, which had seemed, at its committal, sufficient to cancel all her former obligations; but she remembered that she had known a happy childhood, and a girlhood when money had been lavishly expended with the desire to compensate for the sorrow which he had occasioned, by the rejection of her first lover. She could not understand the chicanery of which he was accused, but believed that he was subjected to the injustice which usually is meted out to the unfortunate; and so she loved his memory still, and trusted that when the first hour of disappointment had passed, her husband would forgive, if he could not forget, the injury he had sustained.

She was mistaken in Gilbert Norwold. The world, he thought, had revenged itself upon him for his own misdoings, and having suffered persecution, alas, for him, and those connected with him, he had "not learned mercy." Day by day, whenever they had

been together, he left her with some new taunt to bear her company through the many lonely hours, of which her life was composed, and, but for the companionship of her little son, her lot would have been miserable indeed. As her health continued to decline, he declared his intention of giving up their house in town, altogether, and arranged that she should have a simpler home at a watering-place, thus removing her from the very small circle of visiting friends, and which had grown less since the disclosures at her father's death, and the more limited expenditure permitted to her in consequence.

She went, therefore, into the solitude of a populous watering-place, where she had no acquaintance, and as Gilbert's business matters — so he said — kept him much employed in London and elsewhere, she rarely had other companionship than her own small household supplied. It was not wonderful, therefore, that Edward, her little son, became invested with all the love of her whole woman's soul, and in her plans for his future, she forgot the sorrow and the sickness which surrounded her. As his growing intelligence found utterance, she seemed to need no other society, and her days ceased to be wearisome, except when some childish ailment made her associate with it the dreadful possibility of death stealing away her precious treasure. How she would watch, then, that little face, as though seeking to learn from the pallid cheek or the fevered lip, the approaching danger, and by her silent prayers seek to preserve to her the only solace

of her almost widowhood. With what thankfulness and increased love, it seemed, did she receive him back again from that perilous chance wherein his life had been engaged, and hardly came to laugh at her own fears, when experience had taught her how slight had been the peril. But one was at hand, who would prove to her as cruel as death, and do his work in part.

The boy grew into a fine sturdy fellow, and received such mental culture as he was capable of obtaining at a small school devoted to children of his age and condition; and Laura would watch his going and returning with a glad heart, for she knew that he would be a bright man, and would fight as bravely for his place in the world as he did at school, for he brought home evidences of his class victories, and upon one occasion, a swollen nose and a reddened eye, obtained in a gallant skirmish in the playground.

Laura, for a moment or two, hated the little hero who had left those marks upon her boy, but forgave him heartily when she learned that "he was the best fellow in the school, and had given in after the tenth round, and was coming to tea the next evening, if mamma pleased to let him."

Why chronicle such simple instances of a mother's love, when the maternal eyes which may honour these pages with their regards, have read them in their children's lives a hundred times, and never thought them worth recording? They are here set down in

sorrowful remembrance of her, who, having known them to the full, had the pretty book wherein they were to be found torn away, so rudely, that her eyes grew dimmer daily from her tears, and until she closed them for ever.

Gilbert Norwold had been away in Germany for some months, and on his return to England came to his family, bringing with him nothing which made them happier. Edward had been studiously taught to love and honour his father, but children are stubborn learners in the matter of the affections, and remember no lessons that have not been practically illustrated. A cold kiss, short questions, and curt replies, were all that Edward received when his father came or left him, and the boy soon lost all recollection of such brief courtesies, and returned the love of his father in the same proportions as he had received it. He was to receive a proof of his father's care, which, as it might be conducive to his after good, produced in the mind of the boy a sense of injury undefined, yet poignant, which never was entirely effaced, but did its evil work in time to come. This would not have been the case had after-reflection been able to trace in the severity of the act, the hand of parental love seeking to direct the growth of a cherished object, and had he known that a mutual pain must have been inflicted in the process. It was not thus, however, that Gilbert Norwold did his fatherly duty. It was harshly, coldly — even brutally accomplished, and it did the work it was, perhaps, intended to do.

"He had," he said, briefly, "made arrangements to send Edward to school in Germany."

"Alone?" asked the terrified mother.

Of course, to be left alone, although he would make the journey in care of the proprietor of the school. The father had made every inquiry as to the treatment of pupils and course of education, by which the boy would have the chance of becoming a scholar, and of learning that self-reliance which made more than half the success of a man's career.

If this dreadful resolve had been only hinted at a little — a very little time before, so that Laura might have realised the prospect of such a separation by degrees; — if it had then been named as a project to be acted upon hereafter, when her reason could have held some conference with her love, and been brought to acknowledge the necessity for the sacrifice which was asked of her, there might have been some hope that the proposal would have been heard with patience, and possibly assented to with resignation. As it was, she repelled the outrage, and drawing her boy to her side, she said: —

"Gilbert, you cannot have the heart to do this thing! You have been a cruel husband to me for years past, but I have borne all — have I not? — patiently and obediently. You have shut me up here away from the few friends who cared for me, and left me to pursue your own courses unrestricted and unquestioned. I have not complained. You have told me you have suffered great wrong at my father's hands,

and you have weighed your conduct to me, and to this child, against the lost money. I said let it be so! If that will expiate my father's wrong, let it be so! Throughout that time I have had but one consolation, and a great one it has been truly. My love for this boy has sustained me when nothing else could have done so, and I should have died, I doubt not. You would now take him from me for no justifiable reason. You would send him away, and I — and I am never likely to see him more on this side the grave."

She paused from exhaustion, whilst Edward clung to her, never removing his eyes from her face, and never forgetting to his life's end the sorrow he then saw in it.

"Have you done, madam?" asked Norwold, apparently unmoved.

"No! I have not told you all I have to say. I see, at once, that I am complaining to a heart of stone, and shall not move you to show me and this child any compassion. Let that pass. The law gives you no right to take my child from me, and nothing but brute force shall separate us. If you will resort to that, I will appeal to the law, and make public the wretched life I have led at you bidding, to be made utterly miserable by what you propose to do. Now I have finished."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Norwold; "and now listen to me. If you think to deter me from following any course which I think it my duty to pursue, you are mistaken, madam. I believe it to be my duty

to send that boy from your teaching and your indulgence, and to have him brought up as a man and a gentleman. I shall take the course I consider best for the accomplishment of my views, and to-morrow morning Edward goes with me to France, and thence to Germany. Now I have finished."

He placed his hat upon his head, deliberately arranged his cravat by the glass, and then walked out of the room, closing the door gently after him. His footsteps were heard in the street marking slow-time, as though he were perfectly composed, and Laura saw from the window that he was proceeding to the beach. She saw that he sat down upon the shingle, and after a few moments began to cast stones into the sea, as though he had no grave thoughts in his mind, and was satisfied with that childish amusement.

Laura then carried her terrified boy into her bedroom, and having kissed him passionately, removed the traces of tears from his face and her own. Taking from her jewel-case its valuable contents (her father's gifts) and placing them in her reticule, she proceeded with much deliberation to dress Edward, as for walking, and then put on her own bonnet and shawl, and all this without speaking a word. When their *toilettes* were completed, she kissed the boy again, and said:

"Come, my child."

"Where are we going, mamma?" asked the lad.

"I don't know, dear," replied his mother. "I have not quite decided. God will guide us."

They went out into the busy town, and made their way to the coach office, where they learned that the afternoon coach to London started in an hour. Laura secured two inside places, giving the name of Lauriston. Nothing could have been more calm and collected than her manner, even when she saw Norwold pass the shop where she was waiting the departure of the coach, and enter the hotel nearly opposite. She accepted that incident as an assurance that her flight to London was less likely to be discovered by her husband. The coach started at last, and it was with difficulty that she could reply to the boy's inquiries concerning the objects they passed on the road, until the second change had been made, and she fancied they were secure from pursuit. Until then she had feared that Norwold might have returned to her house, and been curious as to her absence. She needed not to have disquieted herself, as that gentleman was quietly taking his dinner, and remained over his wine until late in the evening; when, having a regard for his digestion, he slept where he had dined.

When Laura arrived in London, she ordered a hackney coach and proceeded direct to the house of her husband's agent, Mr. Jasper Jellifer, to the utter consternation of that self-seeking person. He had, as we know, left Morden, and was now engaged as a commission agent, and dealt in everything that promised to yield him a profit.

"Mr. Jellifer," said Laura, "you are, I see, surprised to find me here; but I have come to town very

unexpectedly, and, having been away from London so long, I venture to intrude upon you."

"Oh, no intrusion, madam," said Jellifer. "None in the least. Does Mr. Norwold know of your coming?"

"Not at present," replied Laura, curtly. "I must trespass upon your kindness for a bed, and to-morrow I will tell you my business in London."

Jellifer was in a quandary. He knew pretty well that his employer, Mr. Norwold, and his lady, were not the most attached couple in the world, and he was fearful of placing himself in some difficulty by receiving the wife unknown to her husband. He, therefore, stammered out how much pleasure he felt at being of service, and retreated to consult Mrs. Jellifer, who, with the quickness of her sex, instantly surmised that there had been some domestic difference, and with natural curiosity, was anxious to know all about it, especially as she could see no damage to Jasper from affording a night's shelter to the lady and child of their excellent and honoured employer, Mr. Norwold. Besides, Jasper would become master of the situation, should there be any mystery on foot, and she knew enough of her worthy help-mate to be certain that he would find a way to turn such a position to his advantage. Laura, however, was provokingly uncommunicative, as her only purpose in seeking Jellifer was to obtain a shelter for the night, intending in the morning to ask the assistance of a friend of her late father, and whose place of business only was known to

her, as it was there she had been taken when she signed her marriage settlement. In her terror and her simplicity, she had overlooked the danger she had incurred by carrying her dove into the nest of the hawk.

During her sleepless night this thought occurred to her, and she became impatient for daybreak, when she might redeem the mistake she had made, supposing the Jellifers to be base enough to betray her to her husband, should they suspect that she had left home without his consent or knowledge. The morning came at last, but with it the consequences of the excitement of the previous day and night, and the poor fugitive exhausted in mind and body, was incapable of further exertion. Fever succeeded, and then as Mrs. Jellifer sat by the bed-side, she listened to mutterings and delirious utterances which told her almost all the truth of Laura's flight and intention.

The course of Jasper Jellifer was clear enough to him when he had heard his wife's revelation. He started instantly to Mr. Norwold's chambers in the Albany, arriving there shortly after that gentleman, who had posted up to London directly the flight of his wife and son came to his knowledge. The face of Gilbert had almost a fiendish expression as he listened to Jellifer's communication; and without staying to partake of the refreshment which he had ordered, he returned with Jasper to the house, where his wife was lying unconscious even of her own suffering. When Gilbert stood beside the bed of the fever-stricken wo-

man, whom he had sworn to love and cherish, it is only the truth to record that he looked upon her unmoved, and without a feeling of pity. His stubborn, selfish nature felt no remorse, and he found his justification in the reflection that her own act had produced the result he now witnessed. Jasper was ordered to procure the needful medical aid, concealing the patient's name and condition, and then conduct the boy to the Albany, where some person should be waiting to receive him.

For some days it was thought that Mrs. Norwold would succumb to the fever, as her weakened constitution was adverse to her recovery; but she improved at last, and when consciousness returned, her first inquiry was for the boy.

She listened to Mrs. Jellifer's reply without any visible emotion, but when the physician came again he shook his head despondingly, and said, "Something is very wrong, indeed."

For days and days the poor patient continued to lie almost in a stupor, and when at length "the shadow of death" passed away, she appeared to have forgotten all things, even her child. At last, when death, the merciful, came to release her spirit, the cloud over her mind seemed to pass away, and with her saddened face turned heavenward, she murmured the name of her boy, and died.

In due time Gilbert Norwold took his son to Germany, and as there was no longer a dear mamma at home, Edward was contented enough to remain with

the really kind schoolmaster and his wife, who, knowing something of the history of the past, strove to win the love of the little fellow: and as children are grateful receivers of kindness, they soon succeeded in their pious object, receiving, in return, almost filial affection and obedience, through the twelve years that Edward remained under their charge, as he continued to reside with them after he had entered the University.

Norwold saw Edward occasionally when he paid holiday visits to Germany, and their correspondence was regular and at appointed intervals — that was all which passed between them — so that the father gained no place in the heart of his son, as he never sought it, but left him to remember always the miserable day when he clung terrified to his mother's side, and looked up into her face, and noted the agony, fear, and sorrow then depicted upon it. When Edward grew to know the meaning of all that he then saw and heard, remembering his mother, his mind became filled with angry thoughts which he never tried to restrain.

The incision made in the rind of the sapling grows into a scar as time progresses, and nothing can efface it. — WAIT FOR THE END.

CHAPTER XVII.

Jack Spraggatt having had his own Way, does not wait for the Consequences.

THE *diligence* from Havre was half-an-hour behind its time, and as Madame Letty and her husband had anticipated the hour appointed for its arrival by full thirty minutes, their excitement was intense when the loud cracking of the driver's whip, and the thundering rumble of the stupendous conveyance announced that the long-looked-for had come at last. The expectation depicted in the faces of M. and Madame Fichard, however, gradually faded away when the *coupé*, *banquette*, and *rotonde* disgorged themselves of their passengers, and no one resembling Jack Spraggatt and their unknown niece presented themselves. Unless, perhaps, the rough-bearded man who was speaking most execrable French, and claiming a multitude of packages, partly by words and partly by muscular demonstration, could be he, and the pretty slender girl who seemed to have lost herself in wondering at all she saw, could be Florence Warner.

"Il est à moi, I tell you!" said rough-beard. "Regardez-vous mon nom on the trunk, you fool. John Spraggat!"

It was he!

"Mais non, M'seu," replied the porter. "Il est à Mademoiselle Warner!"

That must be Florence.

"Tout le même! Tout le même!" cried Jack. "Je suis Mademoiselle Warner aussi — that is, I'm her uncle," and turning round to corroborate the assertion by an appeal to Florence, he was surprised to see her folded in the embrace of a plump lady, who was supported in her turn by the arm and large cotton umbrella of a pursy Frenchman, who waved above their heads a white beaver hat of considerable dimensions.

"Good gracious!" thought Jack; "Letty can't have grown to that size, nor can M. Fichard have swollen to that figure in twenty years!"

In a moment his doubts were removed, as Madame and M. Fichard transferred their embraces to his own portly figure, and when Monsieur impressed a brother-in-law's kiss upon the sunburnt cheek of the colonist, his blushes fairly illuminated his beard and whiskers.

Jack's first impulse was to knock down his affectionate relative; but, remembering that it was the custom of the country, he contented himself with rubbing his face, and giving in return a shake of the hand which left the receiver's fingers powerless for a few minutes.

Letty carried off her niece forthwith in a *fiacre*, leaving her husband and Jack to follow with the luggage, and to satisfy the host of clamorous porters,

who had all done nothing to assist in its transfer from the *diligence* to the *voitures*, which were now driven away to M. Fichard's residence in the *Champs Élysées.*

The route from the *Messageries* was through some of the best streets in Paris, and Florence was entranced with the wonders which she saw on every side. The grand houses, the beautiful shops, the stately public buildings, the noble *Places*, the gay dresses of the people, all combined to fascinate and surprise her. She was indeed in the Fairy Land of which she had dreamed so often; but oh! how unmeasurably it exceeded all that she had conceived of this abode of pleasure! What she had heard of it was true, then! and how she loved that dear Aunt Letty, who had, like the good godmothers in her fairy-books, called her over the sea from that drowsy Bathurst, to share in the delights which abounded everywhere in this happy city. And then, when she was almost dizzy with succeeding novelties, how grateful was the change to the green trees and flower-beds of the *Champs Élysées*, and the groups of happy children keeping long holiday under their shade — now filling the swings and roundabouts — now spending countless *sous* in lemonade and gingerbread, whilst their white-capped attendant *bonnes* plied their needles, or chatted to some gallant soldier, who, released awhile from his duty to Mars, was devoting himself to the service of Cupid, until lured away by some eloquent mountebank or juggler, or *prima donna* of the *café concerts.*

The *fiacre* stopped at one of the lofty houses near the *Rond-Point*, and Florence could hardly believe that she heard correctly when she was told that there her home was to be so long as she pleased to make it so. There was a shop for the sale of furniture on the ground floor, and M. Fichard occupied the *premier* and *deuxième*, a domestic arrangement which somewhat surprised the young colonist. The other apartments were distributed, as they usually are in French houses, among lodgers, who rarely have any intercourse with each other. The only person with whom the Fichards were acquainted was Herr Dortz, an old Teuton, who professed to teach French, English, and German to any one desirous of acquiring those languages, at 3 frs. a lesson. He lived in the capital of this domiciliary pillar, and which would have been called the attic in this common-place England.

There was no doubt how welcome the visitors were to their hospitable relatives, and Jack had a long battle with the Fichards before those kindly people would consent to make terms for Florence's future residence with them. They protested, entreated, resented, but all to no purpose. Jack was firm as a rock, as he had promised Warner to make a fair arrangement, and if M. and Madame Fichard refused to allow him to fulfil his mission, why he should take Florence to England, and place her in some boarding-school. This idea was positively revolting to M., Madame, and Ma'amselle, and so the Fichards accepted the hard conditions on which they could retain their niece, and

Jack Spraggatt had his way. The delayed recognition of this delicate treaty had not been permitted to interfere with their enjoyments, and Florence had been taken to more wonders, and had heard and seen more pleasant things than she had ever believed the great world contained. Letty was an admirable *chaperone*, as time had not destroyed her own relish for such agreeable excitements; and some staid guardians might have paused to consider, whether she was quite the right person to be entrusted with the charge of a young impressionable girl, whose mind had to be directed and formed, coming, as it were, from the nursery life of the new world into the dazzling fascinations of the Pleasure metropolis of the old.

If Letty were not the most proper guide and teacher, Jack Spraggatt was the last man to discover it. The long years of absence from each other had made him love Letty more than he had ever done before, and to see Florence so happy in her new state, blinded him to any dangers that might lie hidden among the flowers about her path. Such reflections might have come to him had he been permitted to have remained a looker-on for any length of time, but the first mail which followed him from Bathurst brought news that Warner had met with a serious accident, and that he requested Jack to return by the next ship in case of need. This painful intelligence — so far as her father was concerned, had to be kept from Florence, and she parted from Uncle Jack, believing him to be a very unsettled naughty old fellow.

"Ah, Florence! dear Florence!" said that maligned individual, "when next we meet it will be to put the great sea between us no more, I trust. May God guide and guard you until that good time comes, and ever afterwards."

A good ship and a skilful mariner left little to fear for Uncle Jack in his long voyage back to the new world; but who could say with such a frail bark as Florence Warner, and with such a pilot as Madame Letty, what course would be steered, or what haven they would make?

Florence soon perceived her educational deficiencies, and therefore set to work with a will to acquire the French language, not, however, under the tutelage of Herr Dortz, but assisted by one of the best masters of Paris. The old German was content to teach her his own language, and his report of her capacity and assiduity was equally favourable with those of her music and dancing masters, so that when the letters of Florence were read aloud in the home in the distant colony, Warner and Uncle Jack were delighted at the wisdom of the course they had advised and followed, and Lucy endeavoured to be satisfied also. She was not always successful, for she feared that her love and watchfulness might still be wanting, to chide with gentleness, or to direct with prudence her susceptible and wayward child. They barter to a disadvantage who exchange for the loving care of a perfect mother any other earthly promise, though it may lead to a throne.

Time mowed among flowers, and Florence gathered them up for a long summer year, and until she was nineteen — sweet nineteen. To keep her birthday, and to give poor Herr Dortz an opportunity of taking baths for the obstinate rheumatism which afflicted him, it was determined to spend a week at *Enghien les Bains*, six miles from Paris; and because it was a very pleasant place in summer time, when balls and *fêtes* were of frequent occurrence. The change of scene from the white glare of the streets of Paris to the beautiful valley of Montmorency was acceptable to all, and the numerous amusements of *les Bains* moderated the transition from the gaieties of the city, and left nothing to be desired or regretted.

In one of their morning strolls, Herr Dortz had the pleasure of meeting a former pupil, one who had benefited by his instruction some six years ago in Germany, and this chance recognition was evidently gratifying to both.

"My bubil M. Edward, my dear bubil Edward," said Herr Dortz, speaking what he was pleased to consider English. "He has com to *les Bains* for a day of pleasure, and he has not found it. Shall we not help him to find what he has com to seek? and ask him to be of our barty?"

The Fichards were not the churls to reject such a proposition, so M. Edward was invited to join in an extemporised pic-nic, and a visit to the *Hermitage*, where once resided Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The little party had been increased to nearly a dozen, by the

adherence of some acquaintance of the Fichards, and as they all brought good spirits and easy tempers to the sylvan *fête*, the day passed away so merrily that Florence was surprised to find the daylight going. It is true, that for nearly all the latter part of the day, she had been listening to M. Edward's jokes and stories, and snatches of song in French, German, and English; for, as in duty bound, he had been the cavalier to Aunt Letty and herself. All the way back to Enghien the German and M. Edward interchanged old pleasantries with each other, as though the pupil had so much youth in him that he had lent part of it to his old master. To dissolve immediately such a pleasant union as the little party had made that day, would have been folly, and therefore it was resolved and carried unanimously, that they should all meet at the ball later in the evening. All were faithful to their tryst — the ball commencing at the rational hour of eight. Mr. Edward proved as good a dancer as he had been a talker, and Florence could not refuse him when he asked her for the third time to become his partner in a *quadrille*. As every one had come there to dance, and all carried out their intention to the full, they were satisfied when the clock struck eleven, and the tired band followed their example. Oh, what a moon shone forth that night to light the happy revellers to their homes, and the chaste goddess would not have looked down thus benignly had there been anything to censure in mirth harmless as theirs. Would that cold moonlight ever change to an unextinguishable

flame consuming all remembrance of duty, and of willing parental sacrifices made through years of love?

M. Edward's day of pleasure had been so satisfactory — of course, because it had renewed his intimacy with dear Herr Dortz, — that he resolved to continue for the rest of the week at Enghien, and try the baths also, in case, at any future day rheumatism should be his portion. A bad reason, says the adage, is better than none; or so lame an excuse, M. Edward, should have condemned you to solitary confinement, until all but your old preceptor, had departed. Three short — how very short! happy days passed away, and then M. Fichard being compelled to return to his business in Paris, the little party embraced where permissible, and otherwise made their *adieux*, going their several ways, and taking with them some of the sunshine of the past to brighten many a shadowy hour in the time to come.

The next lesson which Herr Dortz attempted to give Florence should not have been charged in the account, as Aunt Letty came into the room and continued all the time usually devoted to study, talking over the events of their pleasant holiday, and commending Herr Dortz for having introduced such an agreeable addition to their party as M. Edward, whose surname, by the way, had never been mentioned. Herr Dortz could not for the life of him recollect it, as he had always called him Edward when he was under his tutelage, but he would ask him when he called again, if Madame wished it.

He had called, then?

No doubt of it, and had even proposed for a course of reading, in order to refresh his German. There was nothing surprising or unusual in such an incident, and yet Florence felt the blood mount into her face, as she said involuntarily, "Indeed!" Herr Dortz was proud of his old pupil, grateful, perhaps, for the proposed employment, and he talked so glibly and earnestly of his good qualities and acquirements that, as we have said, the German lesson was forgotten, although the whisperings of a new language was possibly heard by one of the listeners.

As M. Edward descended the stairs after his next visit to Herr Dortz, he stopped at the *premier* landing place, and rang the bell at M. Fichard's door. The ladies were abroad, and therefore he left a card inscribed Mr. Edward Norwold, No. 6, Rue St. Honoré.

Aunt Letty was vexed not to have been at home, the more so as the name — not a very singular one — set her wondering whether he was any connection of the Norwolds she had known years ago. But for that circumstance we question whether she would have pressed M. Fichard so earnestly to call the ensuing day, and ask M. Edward to favour them with his company to dinner.

A la bonne heure! The young gentleman was luckily within, and the invitation was one of the most agreeable that could have presented itself. Herr Dortz, too, was invited — poor fellow! he had rarely any engage-

ments — to meet his pupil, and at six o'clock the party of five sat down to a small, well arranged dinner, made additionally agreeable by the interest all had in each other.

"The sight of your name," said Aunt Letty, as the dinner and conversation progressed, "carried me from France to England, as I was born at Morden."

"Morden! Morden!" said Edward, "I rather fancy I have some recollection of that name — but it has been my father's pleasure to allow me to visit England once only, and that for a very short time, since I left for Germany. I was then quite a child."

"There was a family of your name living at Morden," continued Letty, "and I thought you might have been a connection."

"Possibly I am," replied Edward, "but for some unexplained reason I have been kept away from all my family connections, and having only very painful recollections of my childhood, I have been contented with my exile, and shall be more so since you have admitted me to the pleasure of your friendship."

Aunt Letty acknowledged such a compliment with the sweetest smile and most graceful bow, although she felt that Mr. Edward Norwold did not care to be questioned, and that the subject was painful to him. Yes, he had said so. The conversation, therefore, went upon other subjects, and it was evident that Mr. Edward Norwold had known a great many good

people wherever he had travelled, and was well-received in Paris. He was a gentleman, — no doubt of that. When he was leaving later in the evening, he asked permission to call occasionally, as it was more than probable that he should continue in Paris for another year, until he was of age and at liberty to choose his own career for the future. "I hope I shall find," he added, "that I am connected with your old friends."

"Oh! they were not friends," said Letty.

"Well then, with Moreton."

"Morden," said Letty, correcting him.

"Morden, Morden, I shall not forget the name again, as I have done, if it was ever known to me before," and then having bade them all good night, he went his way.

"He is a very nice fellow," said Aunt Letty, "but not one of our Norwolds, evidently," and having this conviction, and not seeing so plainly as we do, what was looming in the future, she continued to call him Mr. Edward, and never mentioned this meeting to her sister in any of her letters, for how could the Warners in New South Wales care to know that she had met a stray Norwold in Paris?

Florence had, we fancy, received another lesson in that language of which she had heard the whispering, when Herr Dortz was the teacher, as she sat long at her window peopling the Elysian Fields with creations

of her own, long after the lights of the *cafés concerts* had disappeared among the trees, and the hum of the adjoining streets had given place to silence.

A worn goose-quill, telling of long labour accomplished, is not the instrument wherewith to trace the bright hopes and the sweet words of a pure first love, and we have none other. Yet we must record, that insensibly, undesignedly, as we pass from youth to age, the pleasant companionship of Florence and Edward Norwold grew into love.

Great mystery of our nature! who can define it? Some speaker's voice long lingers in the ear when the lips which breathed the words are hushed and absent. Simple phrases that may have been heard a hundred times before, when uttered by that voice, live in the heart, and come like recurrent echoes. A form pursues the thought, and will not be denied, until it becomes the constant companion of our waking hours and our dreams, making no pleasure perfect where it is not. Then grows within us a great charity which blinds us to all faults, and a liberal fancy which conceives perfections until a willing faith receives them as realities. All self-love dies, and our strong desires, whether for wealth, fame, life, or honour, must be joined to a hope that one will share the blessing, or they stimulate no more. The mind becomes subservient to its idol, and trains itself to make its worship perfect. And more — —

No! the words we have written shall remain, but

they do not describe what love is — what love should be — nor what it was in the young pure hearts of those whose fate it was about to influence so materially.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Clandestine Marriage openly performed.

A DAY'S holiday at Meudon having been arranged by the Fichards, a pleasant drive of some five or six miles brought them to the *château*, Edward riding upon the box, as the old German was, as usual, of the party. After an inspection of the house and beautiful gardens, which occupy an elevated situation, commanding an admirable view of Paris and the meanderings of the graceful Seine, the little party took their way to the adjoining forest, the gentlemen carrying the baskets containing the materials for their repast, whilst the ladies carried M. Fichard's great umbrella and fluffy white hat. There was no difficulty in finding a fitting resting place in the forest, and a snowy cloth spread upon the green-sward was soon covered with *pâtés*, salads, chickens, and strawberries, whilst M. Edward went to the house of one of the keepers for fresh water, and a jug of cream. Three or four bottles of wine completed the arrangements for their simple meal, which was heartily enjoyed. As on all occasions, M. Edward's attentions were equally divided between Madame Letty and Florence, and therefore the other gentlemen had little to do but enjoy themselves.

The day was beautifully fine, and there was a laziness in the air which soon overpowered M. Fichard, until he fell asleep, leaning his back against a tree, whilst his wife, equally affected, laid her head upon his shoulder after covering her face with her handkerchief, and added, it must be recorded, a gentle treble to her husband's *basso profondo*. Herr Dortz had a passion for mushrooms, and was generally seized in season and out of season with an irresistible desire to search for them, and upon the present occasion he wandered away in pursuit of his coveted delicacy. Florence and M. Edward were left therefore to amuse themselves as best they could, and desired no additional society. Their conversation had been about Paris and its gaieties, and M. Edward had inquired how long Florence intended to remain among them?

"I believe for another year at least," she replied, "and I shall leave France with regret."

"You are not affected then with the *maladie du pays*," said Edward, smiling.

"I am not, I confess, although my life at home was a very happy one. Were it not that I am apart from my dear, dear parents, I should have no wish to return. As it is, I would rather go back to Bathurst — dull, dreary Bathurst, than to any other place in the world."

"Indeed!" said Edward, looking her in the face, surprised to see it so suddenly saddened, and her eyes filled with tears. "Do you love your parents so very much?"

"Love them so much! I should be ungrateful indeed, did I not love them from the depth of my heart," replied Florence. "If you knew dear mamma, you would not wonder, as you seem to do, at the strength of my affection. So gentle, unselfish, and forbearing, never wearied by the waywardness of her naughty child, never chiding her but with the tenderest words. O mother, dear mother, when shall I be with you again!" Florence clasped her hands together, and raised her tearful eyes, as though she sought her mother's face in the bright blue heaven above her head.

"And your father," said Edward, after a short pause — "do you love him as dearly?"

"Yes — quite, quite as dearly! When I had little griefs so insignificant, that they are forgotten now, he used to soothe me with such caressing words, that I fear I sought occasion to be troubled that I might hear them. Such a noble, brave man he had been! Mamma has said again and again. He had suffered great wrong, when he was very young, and had neither repined nor despaired, but went to New South Wales, and made his home in the lonely Bush, and worked himself up to wealth and position. His injuries had purified his heart, mamma said, but had not cankered it, and all the goodness of his nature was cast about our lives, and made us the happy household we were until — —" Florence paused.

"May I ask you to go on?" said Edward.

"Yes, until I fear their love for me brought the

first great sorrow home, and there it will continue until I return to them. And I will return and strive to do so contentedly, whenever Uncle Jack comes to take me home again."

"Uncle Jack?" asked Edward. "Is he in Europe?"

"No, dear soft-hearted, loving Uncle Jack was re-called back to Bathurst after he had placed me with Aunt Letty. I knew not at the time that it was an accident to my father which made his return necessary, or I should have gone with him. What think you, M. Edward? He sold his location in the Bush in order to bring me here, because his wayward niece had fancied that the colony was not good enough for her. Oh, you would so like Uncle Jack!"

M. Edward was sitting with his knees clasped in his hands, looking thoughtfully before him. At length he said slowly, "Father, mother, and Uncle Jack, and all loved, and all loving so very dearly! I had a mother who loved me very dearly, Miss Warner, although I never saw her gentle face without the trace of sorrow, even when it seemed most happy. She died when I was very young, died as I believe from cruel neglect, and wrong at the hands of one who should have cherished and protected her. I see her very often, see her now, and love her as a child would do — for my love has grown no wiser, no stronger since she died. Would it were otherwise." The speaker paused, and again looked thoughtfully before him.

"But your father, M. Edward, you have a father still," said Florence, at length.

"In name only! In name only! I was not eight years old when he took me to Germany, and left me in charge of a schoolmaster and his wife. Dear good souls, they faithfully discharged their trust, and in a measure filled the void in my infant heart. But my father, — *you* will hardly believe me, — I have not seen him, excepting during a short stay in England — twenty times since my mother died. He put me away from him during her short life. He has left me to the care of strangers, contenting himself that his duty was done by paying money. He has defrauded me of the exercise of my affections, and has cheated me of the happiness of my childhood, for I already see that manhood brings its sorrows, and that life has its phases of struggle, victory, or defeat. I should have rebelled, uselessly rebelled years ago, but for the kindly remonstrance and advice of my dear old schoolmaster. Remembering his teaching, I have brought myself to bear with patience, and to perform with obedience whatever my *father* requires of me — until the time comes, another year only, when I shall be free to choose my own career. But the past will remain with me until my life's end — the cold, cruel, bitter past wherein since my mother died, I have found no outlet for the love which God has planted in our young hearts; because my father would not let it flow, but dammed it back by his own selfishness and pride, and wicked indifference!" Edward again clasped his knees, and rocked himself to and fro, as though in bodily pain.

"Poor M. Edward," said Florence, her eyes once

more filled with tears, "how much — how very much —I pity you. I am sorry that I spoke of your father."

"No — do not regret it, I beseech you, dear Miss Warner," he replied. "It is a relief — an unutterable relief to have told you this — to you who, so blessed in your own home relations, can feel for me, so lone and so deserted. The most pleasurable moments of my life have been those which I have passed with you — and these kind friends; and, I know not why, I cannot divest myself of a belief in your aunt's impression, that we are connected some way by old times or place, and I feel that I am not quite alone in yonder great city, as I was before I knew you. I bless Herr Dortz every day that he has made us known to each other."

Florence, as he spoke, could not keep her eyes fixed upon his, as had been her wont, but her long lashes drooped slowly down, and, with some difficulty, she said: —

"Was Herr Dortz your old schoolmaster?"

"No; he was an usher in the school, but pitying the poor lonely English lad, he showed me many kindnesses in his quiet way. I am glad to be his pupil again, as he so much needs one." He paused, and then continued. "I see him yonder among the trees, coming towards us. Before he disturbs this strange, yet to me most happy meeting, allow me to ask you a great favour — a very great one."

Florence would have spoken, but she could only smile most sweetly, and bow assent.

"Let me —" said Edward, looking intensely in

earnest — "let me for the time to come call you Florence."

Another bow, another smile, but the face was all over blushes as she assented now.

"O thank you, Florence!" (Her name had never sounded so musical before!) "One more request, one more — a greater still! Call me Edward. I will only believe that it is a sister speaking; but call me Edward."

How could he press her with his earnest eyes to answer, when he saw her full bosom rise and fall enough to stifle sound?

Thus implored, she made one effort, and murmured only —

"Edw— No, no! I must say M. Edward; but — you will call me Florence!"

He seized her hand, and the involuntary shriek she gave made M. Fichard start from his stertorous slumber; and as Madame Letty was, very properly, leaning upon him for support, the portly lady rolled upon the grass.

A merry laugh from Herr Dortz, who had arrived; a merry laugh from M. Fichard, who had awakened, and from M. Edward, who could not help it; but such a confused bewildered look from pretty Florence, that her aunt would have been amazed had she regarded her.

There was nothing more to be done at Meudon but to distribute the fragments of the feast to the forester's children, pack up the *materiel* in the hand baskets,

and then return to Paris. Herr Dortz was a great admirer of sunsets, and Edward tried to persuade him but in vain to ride home on the box, in order that he might have a better view of Paris under departing daylight. No! the good old scholar would not deprive his generous pupil of such a pleasure, and insisted on re-occupying his seat next to Florence. Edward was ashamed of his own duplicity, as he read sincerity in the puckers and wrinkles of the old German's smile, and only forgave himself when he saw how beautiful was the one other face whereon he had looked, and found a sister's sympathy. The ride home was quickly performed, and M. Edward made his *adieux*, holding Florence's hand for a moment — only a moment longer than he had ever ventured to do before.

Only a moment! but we have ceased to measure events by time, even in less material things than nerves and hearts. The electric current makes its "girdle round the earth" in time that is uncomputable; and why should not the invisible, impalpable influence that is to encompass a whole life perform its function in a moment.

As M. Edward had told Madame Letty of his compact with Florence, and as that lady saw no objection to it, especially as she herself was entreated to confer the same favour, and as M. Fichard and Madame had heard from their niece so much of the conversation in the forest of Meudon as Florence could or would remember to repeat, M. Edward's attention and visits were received without alarm or suspicion by all except

the real object of them. Grateful as Florence felt them to be, they were not altogether without alloy, as she had at times a vague conviction that she was pursuing a clandestine course of conduct which was neither just to her unsuspecting and confiding aunt, nor to her absent and devoted parents. True, Edward had never said one word to her in secret which might not have been repeated without exciting a suspicion that it had a meaning far deeper than the words ordinarily conveyed; but there were looks and tones unheeded by all but her, which could not be mistaken by her pure and susceptible heart, and which were to become either balm or poison to its peace. It was not possible for her to reject this knowledge, and so she came to believe that he loved her, even as she knew she had learned to love him. Her mother's quick affection and jealous eye would have discovered the great secret, hidden in her daughter's heart, seeing that there were pensive moments when Florence neither heard nor saw what was taking place around her. She would have noticed a flushing cheek and a sudden silence when some common-place was uttered, or some ordinary civility was performed. She would have observed an expressive smile or a downward glance, when Edward came or went away, and would have suspected the cause which made Florence so late a watcher, when she should have been sleeping peacefully. But between that dear watchful mother, and her loving child, thousands of miles of water intervened, and she could only seek to guard her beloved one by her prayers and her written counsels.

The slumbering fire would surely find a breath to blow it into flame! It came from Edward's father.

Sir Gilbert Norwold — he was a baronet now — wrote to his son a formal dictatory letter, such as his communications to Edward had always been, reminding him that he would shortly be of age, and that as the family — he had married again some years before — were going to Switzerland, he would defer keeping the day until their return to London. Edward cared little for this indifference on the part of his father, he had been too long accustomed to such neglects; but there was, however, one passage in the letter which, for a time, stirred his indignation. Without consulting his son in any way, Sir Gilbert had arranged, he said, for Edward's early departure to India, where he was to enter the civil service, and provide for the future by the exercise of his own talent. This course would not have been objectionable, perhaps, had Edward been consulted; but he resented this despotic disposal of his life, and resolved at once to decline compliance.

The cooler counsels of M. Fichard obtained a hearing, and he was persuaded to wait the completion of his minority, and to avail himself of this ungracious offer, unless some fairer prospect was open to him.

"In India," said M. Fichard, "you will find your place, my dear young friend, and none that know you can doubt but it will be one of the foremost. You have no ties to break in this Europe of ours, so go to the land of the sun and become a Nabob."

No tie to break in Europe! Those words had con-

vinced him for the first time, perhaps, that there was one united to his heart-strings — from whom it would be death to separate. To part from Florence! Never to hear the music of her voice again! To put the space of his whole life between their meeting! Such thoughts had never entered his mind before, and now that they came crowding in, he grew bewildered. There she sat, her sweet face almost as bloodless as his mother's when he looked upon it for the last time as she lay in her grave-clothes.

As motionless as though that which she had heard had been words of grammary changing her into marble, sat Florence. She too had never thought that there could be a parting hour, but had trusted all to the happy, deceitful present.

Could he have been a living, loving man, and not spoken then? No!

"What have you said, M. Fichard?" he cried. "What have you said, that in a moment I seem to be changed from an apathetic clod into the most daring of mankind? No tie in Europe! No tie in this very chamber that I could break from and live! Oh, my dearest, only friends, forgive me if I have unwittingly betrayed your confidence; if I have, without consideration, perilled the peace of one who is more dear to you — more dear to me — than any other that loves her, be he who he may. Yes, I must speak — I cannot be silent now; I love her! I love you, Florence; and as you are a truthful, honest, loving woman, confess that you return my love."

He had thrown himself at her feet, and as he spoke, she fell back into the arms of her aunt as though his passionate words had killed her. It was, however, but the similitude of death — the shadow of the king of shadows — and it soon passed away.

A nature less honest, less loving, or more schooled in worldly feelings, might have resented such a sudden onset to surprise her into a confession of the secret of her heart; but with the truthfulness to which he had appealed, she threw her answer into her face, and then fell weeping upon the neck of her kneeling lover.

All that followed was confused, painful, and pleasurable; each felt in turn that some great catastrophe had overtaken them, and that the last hours which had passed would be memorable as long as they should live.

Such a trying scene was not without its effect upon Florence, and for some days she had to keep her chamber. During this time, she and Aunt Letty had many conferences, and it was resolved that letters should be dispatched by the next mail to Bathurst, narrating all that had transpired, and asking the parental approval of what chance, and not design, had made necessary to the future happiness of Florence.

As for Aunt Letty, it must be confessed that she was rather satisfied than otherwise with the course of events, now that she knew that Edward was the son of Sir Gilbert Norwold; and considering herself *in loco parentis*, she did not hesitate to allow the lovers free access to each other, planning, indeed, many pleasant

excursions, and contriving other opportunities of meeting, believing that she was consulting the present and future happiness of her niece by so doing.

"It was very naughty of you, Florence," she said, "to fall in love without giving Aunt Letty notice of your intention to do so, and had it been with any unworthy person, I don't know what I should have done. Brother Jack, to say nothing of Mr. Warner and Lucy, would never have forgiven my want of foresight. It was very sly of you."

Florence could only smile, and declare the truth. That the act had been unpremeditated, and that no unworthy object could have won her regard — of that she was certain. But when all Edward's claims to be loved were considered, was it to be wondered at that she had given him her heart as soon as he had asked her for it?

"No, it was not to be wondered at," replied Letty; "and I am sure that your dear mamma will be delighted at the selection you have made. Only to think! Not only is he the most amiable, accomplished dear young fellow I know, but he is the heir to our native baronetcy, and must some day succeed to the Morden property and Norwold Hall, ruin that it is. They say the course of true love never does run smooth, but I see no reason, my darling, why yours should do otherwise, and therefore you have Aunt Letty's permission to love, and be as happy as two silly fond creatures can be."

Was Aunt Letty to blame? Not very much, looking at the case from the plaintiff's side of the question.

Edward had also written to Mr. Warner, detailing his family connections and future expectations. Had that letter reached its destination it would have been read as though traced by the hand of a destiny that sought to annul the deep injustice of the past, and to restore to Florence the advantages of her birthright, despite the abnegation of her father.

All the letters had been dispatched to the distant colony before any one thought of Sir Gilbert and the acceptance he was likely to accord to these arrangements for introducing Florence Warner into the proud family of the Norwolds as the wife of its future heir. M. Fichard was the first to speak of some possible difficulty, and Madame Letty turned pale at the thought.

Florence, also, when made to understand the importance that some persons attach to the distinctions of birth and connections, became conscious that her reception might be unsatisfactory, and her natural pride becoming alarmed, she resolved to speak to Edward on the subject.

"My dear love," he said, in reply, "I have not overlooked the possible consequences with my father, but I have been silent, as any surmise that you were not worthy to take rank with the highest, would have been an insult from my lips. Now that you have spoken, I will confess frankly, that I anticipate objections on the part of my father, which I may find it difficult to overcome."

"'Your mother, sir,' he wrote to me, when an-

nouncing his second marriage, 'was *only* a banker's daughter; but I had then political aspirations, and I married her to secure her father's local influences. Our name commands a higher alliance, and I have therefore united myself to the Lady Clara Normanton.' Pshaw! My German student life has discouraged the growth of such old world absurdities. I seek for my happiness in virtue, truth, and love, and I have found them in my darling Florence." He kissed her pretty cheek, and then continued:

"All my life long my father has treated me as some encumbering thing that he was compelled to recognise, and has never endeavoured by act or word to win my affection, or even my esteem. He has doled out to me, as it were, education and maintenance, because I am known to be his son, and I have repaid him with obedience, cold obedience. So much for the past. Our accounts are fairly balanced, and there is an end. For the future I will make my own conditions. He has promised to procure me an appointment in India, and he will do it, I am sure, because it will provide for me without encroaching upon his own pocket. Let me have one foot on the ladder, and do not fear but I shall mount, and with such a stimulus to exertion as you will be, dear Florence, I shall ascend more quickly. If my father receive my choice with the honour which is her due, well — we are friends. If he pause in according her one jot of her just right, we part — not enemies, I trust. It will be only to continue our old relations again. No love, no

reverence — no sympathy on either side. Your love, dear Florence, will be all-sufficient for me. May I deserve it always."

Florence rested her head upon his shoulder, and was silent, although, when this matter had been thought over by her, she resolved that she would urge Edward to consider if the love she had given him was a fair equivalent for the sacrifice he might have to make, and whether he was sure in the time to come, he would never feel regret that he had abandoned so much for her sake. What he had said had made her silent, and she was glad not to have had occasion to urge those questions, for had he answered "No," her heart would have broken.

The family council was satisfied in part with Edward's view of the difficulty, but this dark cloud in the shape of Sir Gilbert Norwold, which would ever and anon cast a passing shadow on their happiness, at last threatened storm and thunder. Sir Gilbert wrote to Edward announcing the receipt of the appointment, and requiring him to return to England in six weeks, and then to be prepared for an early departure for India.

An early departure for India! Florence thought. Away for ever from father, mother, Uncle Jack, even as Edward's wife, was a condition which Florence had never realised until that moment. Six thousand miles could not keep her love from the old home, and thither it went the moment such a separation appeared to be possible. Whenever they had spoken of India,

which had been very seldom, it had had no other effect than was produced by the mention of England, London, France! She had never thought otherwise than that she should be with the distant loved ones again, sharing with them the new happiness she had found in her love and its object!

And could she part with him who had created the new life? Could she send him away alone to fight the battle of life, and whose conquests were to be shared by her, knowing how he had reckoned upon her companionship, to sustain him in the struggle?

What was to be the result?

Aunt Letty could not answer her, neither could M. Fichard. They had not contemplated such difficulties — they had imagined that they had only to await letters from Bathurst, never doubting but that the absent authorities would ratify the treaty, and then to abide the usual culmination of such wooings. In a few days the mail would arrive, but matters would then be no better than they were at present. What was to be done?

Edward — when did a true lover hesitate to cut the Gordian knot, which perplexes and baffles the less interested lookers-on? Edward suggested a bold solution of the difficulty.

"Florence, my beloved," he said, embracing her slender waist, and pressing her sweet head to his bosom, "I will be your guide from this labyrinth of hopes and fears. To part from each other is impossible. It would be to part from life, for neither could

sustain the separation. Such a trial is not demanded of us. In a few days at most we shall have your parents' approval of our love, and then — and then, dear Florence, let me make you my wife — let us be so united that no one can divide us. We will then go together to your distant home, and you shall justify, if you can, the choice you have made in me."

This was cutting the knot undoubtedly, and Aunt Letty and M. Fichard were long in debate as to the advisability of permitting it.

Ah! news of the Mail at last!

Aunt Letty trembled as she prepared to read aloud the paragraph in *Galignani* headed —

"*New South Wales — The Mail.* — We regret to record the total loss of the mail-ship *Josephine*, when within two days' sail of Bathurst. Part of her crew and passengers only were rescued, but none of her mails, and ——"

Letty could read no more, as she saw at once that the whole responsibility of Florence's love-matters rested still with her and her husband.

No reply to their anxious inquiries could be obtained for months, as in Letty's subsequent letter she had merely expressed a hope that the important news which had reached them by the former mail had been favourably received, and that they should soon have occasion to congratulate each other. Florence had been reticent also, upon the one great subject, and had not even mentioned Edward's name in any way, fear-

ing to do so, in case an objection had been taken to the engagement which she had formed so unwittingly.

What was to be done? The question pressed for a reply, as Edward had received a peremptory call to London, and all the hopes of love seemed imperilled by his departure.

What was to be done?

O! Aunt Letty, weak as a kindly woman! O! M. Fichard, submissive as a tender easy husband and a benevolent man! O! Edward and Florence, trusting, hopeful, daring as two young loving hearts should be, why do you all wear those wedding garments, and what have two of you vowed to each other in that little chapel of the Avenue Marbeuf, in the Elysian Fields, which never were visited by happier spirits than those which occupy those hackney *voitures* on their way back to the apartments of M. Fichard.

END OF VOL. I.

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